

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### **The Dancer's Contribution: Performing Plotless Choreography in the Leotard Ballets of George Balanchine and William Forsythe**

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THE DANCER'S CONTRIBUTION: PERFORMING PLOTLESS CHOREOGRAPHY IN  
THE LEOTARD BALLETS OF GEORGE BALANCHINE AND WILLIAM FORSYTHE

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the contributions of dancers in performances of selected roles in the ballet repertoires of George Balanchine and William Forsythe. The research focuses on “leotard ballets”, which are viewed as a distinct sub-genre of plotless dance. The investigation centres on four paradigmatic ballets: Balanchine’s *The Four Temperaments* (1951/1946) and *Agon* (1957); Forsythe’s *Steptext* (1985) and *the second detail* (1991). It explores how performers across different company cultures perform and conceptualise several solo roles in these works. The research focuses on the dancers from the choreographers’ resident troupes (New York City Ballet, Ballett Frankfurt), and performers in the productions by several international repertory companies.

The thesis is structured as a discursive, analytical space that merges two distinct vantage points: that of the spectator and of the performer. Dancers in this thesis, therefore, are not passive subjects, but important contributors and narrators of their individual processes and experiences. The study functions as a meeting place, bringing to light the links between the performer’s ideas and the spectator’s perception of the dance. The methodology integrates ethnographic approaches (observation and qualitative interviews) with movement analysis. The complex influences behind the dancers’ approaches are viewed in relation to their specific cultural contexts and Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus.

The examination of the finer details of the performances and dancers’ contributions in set choreography reveals a range of conceptualisations, from abstract to thematic imagery, and from fictional to documentary narratives. The study demonstrates that the dancers’ imprint in the leotard ballets is a complex set of culturally conditioned, embodied qualities and

actions (both conscious and/or unintended). Together these form a type of individual “agency”, which shapes the look of the role and the overall ballet, particular to a single performance and to specific points in the dancer’s career.

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## INTRODUCTION

In ballet, the performer's role is a complex one. The dancers are required to carry out the choreographer's idea and style faithfully, but even while being in tune with the identity of the specific work, they still make an impact as individuals, infusing the pre-arranged movements with personal ideas and cultural identity, technical abilities, training background and performing style.

Particularly in ballet history, which is abundant in narrative-driven works, the interpretation of a role for lead dancers traditionally involved character portrayal or participation in storytelling. During the development of modernism in art in the early decades of the twentieth-century, however, a variety of artistic ideas emerged that explored the concept of abstraction. In ballet too, a somewhat related trend occurred, as several artists and choreographers began to experiment with producing ballets without specifically indicated story-lines and characters. Along with these new choreographic approaches, the emergence of plotless ballet brought new challenges for the leading dancers, who were now required to perform roles that seemed to make no references to characters, events or stories. How this (at that time novel) concept affected the creative process of some performers is illustrated by one of the former principal dancers with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Frederic Franklin. Decades later Franklin still remembered being bewildered by the request of choreographer George Balanchine, who cast the dancer in his first plotless role. There was no theme, story or character to portray in Balanchine's 1944 *Danses concertantes*. The choreographer asked the dancers to "be themselves." Franklin

said that this was the first time that he was asked to “be himself” on stage, not representing anyone or anything else (Franklin, in Reynolds and Brooks, 1997).

Since that time, plotless ballets have become established as a distinct model within the genre of ballet, and many dancers have discovered ways to bring expression into their so-called abstract roles. An example from a 1962 article by writer Edwin Denby paints a picture of a dancer (New York City Ballet ballerina, Melissa Hayden) who turned particular circumstances (working through an injury) into an opportunity for expressive accentuation of her role in Balanchine’s 1961 practice-clothes work, *Modern Jazz*:

*Variants:*

As she repeated the figure again and again – so she told me – the injury became painful. But as she kept repeating it, angry though she was, and trying to give the rhythm a keener edge, she found the key she had been looking for – the key to the character of her role (Denby, 1998/1962, 281).

While we cannot know very much from this indication, it is clear that the dancers found new ways to think about “expression” even if it meant turning real-life occurrences into moments of creative exploration. Another very vivid image of an internal narrative of a dancer in a plotless ballet was recorded by Balanchine ballerina Suzanne Farrell, who found herself performing a familiar role in an unfamiliar setting. The set of circumstances affected her thoughts and reactions in the moment of performance. She speculates that this may also have affected the look of the dance:

In *Chaconne*, for instance, a ballet I’ve done often, I usually dance to the strings. They are plucking away, and those are the counts that my steps are structured to. Then one summer, Peter [Martins] and I were doing a guest appearance in Chautauqua, and the orchestra was in front of us, outdoors, and the woodwinds and brass were very close to the stage. Their sound carried in our direction, but I couldn’t hear the violins, although I knew the music very well and I could see the

conductor. But I had never heard the horns going boom, boom, boomp, counterpoint to the violins. And I realized I could dance to that also, without changing any of the counts of my choreography. It just becomes a different accent. You move differently. So that performance I danced to the brass. It changed the way I felt, and I assume the way I looked (Farrell, in Tracy, 1983, 156).

Although the process that Farrell describes could be possible in narrative roles too, such anecdotal examples provide us with intriguing clues about the possibilities dancers find when they perform the plotless roles. The existing accounts scattered in dance literature give us only indications of the kinds of (incidental or intentional, conscious or embodied) approaches that performers may develop in this type of repertoire. But, these anecdotal reports, as interesting as may be, do not provide definitive evidence of the ways in which the dancers' thinking and feeling may have affected their performances. Did Hayden's intense emotions in the rehearsal transpire into a visible effect, perhaps suggesting to the viewer a personal drama or a character in the dance? How did the idea of dancing as "oneself" change Franklin's process and performance? Did Farrell's precision in listening and responding to different instruments significantly change the look of her dance? And, finally, what are ballet dancers inspired by in plotless works, and what is the nature of their contribution in this context? While the genre of plotless ballets has gained popularity during the past hundred years, the field of dance studies has not yet explored these questions in great depth.

The aim of this thesis is not to create a set taxonomy of ideas and possible responses that individual performers can develop across the range of plotless roles. This study instead aims to explore how the conditions of what is often deemed as "abstract" dance affect the ballet dancer's task and her or his approach to it. In turn, it also examines in what way the dancer's ideas and contribution influences the spectator's perception of the dance. These

issues are further complicated by the expectations surrounding the twentieth-century ballet dancers, who carefully tread the thin line between their own input and dedication to the choreographic idea. At the core of this investigation there are thus two major foci:

- a. The types of relationships between the ballet dancer and so-called abstract or plotless roles and works.

- b. The nature of the ballet dancer's contribution to this relationship, as further influenced by the twentieth-century model of ballet authorship, where the performer's role is to follow the conditions set by the choreographer (as well as to adhere to the requirements embedded in the framework of the individual company culture).

Since "abstraction" and "non-narrative" in dance are difficult and often ambiguous ideas, Chapter 1 investigates the concept, and clarifies the terminology and framework of the investigation. To examine the core research questions, the thesis focuses specifically on particular plotless works: the lineage of the twentieth-century genre of practice-clothes leotard ballets. This is a sub-genre with a particularly spare aesthetic, that flourished on the stages of Western Europe and the United States of America since the mid-1940s and still continues to be explored to date. The dancers in these works seem to have the fewest references to narratives or dramatic characters, types or personalities, and their creative process is different from that of dancers in story ballets.

Since the emphasis is on the dance movement, and there is no evident dramatic acting, it may be difficult for the spectator to see the dancer's artistic expression in these works. To examine this setting, the main focus of the inquiry will be the dancer's work in lead roles

from the choreographic repertoire of George Balanchine (1904-1983) and William Forsythe (1949- ). Four ballets are selected as representative examples that span across more than four decades: the earliest ballet examined in this thesis is Balanchine's 1951/1946 *The Four Temperaments*, followed by his 1957 *Agon*; Forsythe's works are represented by 1985 *Steptext*, and the most recent among the four, the 1991 choreography *the second detail*.

While Balanchine and Forsythe may not have aimed to contribute to the "leotard ballet" sub-genre with these works, the selected ballets can be seen as paradigmatic for the aesthetic. The two choreographers also have significant features in common: for example, in their respective eras they each interrogated the vocabulary of classical ballet, as well as the conventions of ballet performance. Many aspects of their work, however, are dissimilar. Their working methods and ideas about the scope of the dancer's contribution are quite different, for example. This particular selection of ballets was made in order to ensure that the research reveals both interesting similarities and contrasts, through a consideration of these similarities and differences between the two choreographers and their ballets, their processes and cultural settings.

To understand dancers' own creative input into their performances of the roles studied here, it is important to gain access to their thinking, motivations, and perception of freedom (or lack thereof), and to understand their creative processes and performing approaches. To this effect, the research relies partly on ethnographic methodologies (participant observation and qualitative interviewing). But, as important as it is to understand the dancers' own ideas and processes, the research questions outlined above cannot be

explored without an observation of the relationship between the performer's ideas and the outcome as evident in the performance. With sensitivity to the possible similarities and gaps between the two experiences (of the spectator and the dancer), Chapter 2 explains the methodological approach that was structured specifically in order to blend the two perspectives. Sections 2.3-2.8 explain the rationale and outline various historical and ethnographic components of this method that aims to facilitate a productive analytical meeting ground between the viewer (primarily my own analytical position, informed by historical sources from the viewer's perspective, 2.1) and the performer (ballet dancers from different company cultures, informed by the existing research, 2.2). The performer in this study is thus seen both as a subject and an analytical partner who brings important knowledge that complements the external analysis.

The four selected ballets are prominent in the international repertory and are thus often performed by dancers from diverse backgrounds and in various ballet environments. This study investigates how the same "abstract" role may be interpreted by dancers from different company cultures: the choreographers' resident troupes (New York City Ballet and Ballett Frankfurt), and by national repertory companies (focusing predominantly on productions by the National Ballet of Canada and the Royal Ballet, UK). The contextual environments in which the dancers in this study perform — the company cultures and aspects of training which, combined, form the dancer's "habitus" — are explained in Chapter 3.

Chapters 4 and 5 present two separate case studies that analyse the interpretations of different dancers in two aforementioned works by each choreographer. Each case study

examines several examples of solo lead roles from these four ballets through select approaches and tools taken from the system of Laban movement analysis. This analysis from the outside perspective of the spectator is juxtaposed and integrated with the dancers' own ideas elicited in direct interviews. Chapter 6 compares the two case studies, identifies major themes observed in the analyses, and discusses particular aspects of the dancers' work in leotard ballet roles. This chapter also discusses the nature of the contemporary ballet dancer's role in this repertoire more broadly.



## CHAPTER 1

### MAPPING THE TERRAIN: LOCATING THE GENRE OF LEOTARD BALLET

#### 1.1 DANCERS IN ABSTRACT AND PLOTLESS BALLETS: ISSUES OF TERMINOLOGY

Abstract ballet is a recognisable genre of twentieth-century dance, yet the concept and its associated terminology are complicated. First of all, the terms “abstract”, “plotless” and “non-narrative” are applied to too great a range of aesthetically diverse ballets. The same words are used to describe choreography as distinct as nineteenth-century ballet divertissements, minimally-designed twentieth-century leotard ballets, but also visually ornate dances with programmatic themes. A wide range of aesthetics may be found if one compares, for example, the sparsely designed unitard ballets by Maurice Béjart (for example his 1970 interpretation of *Le Sacre du printemps*), Balanchine’s neo-classical tutu-ballets (such as *Divertimento No.15*, 1956), the lyrical atmosphere of Jerome Robbins’s *Dances at a Gathering* (1969), a colourful festival in Kenneth MacMillan’s *Elite Syncopations* (1974), or the implied dramatic “moods” (Duerden, 2003, 50) in Antony Tudor’s *The Leaves Are Fading* (1975).

Furthermore, in dance literature the terms are used interchangeably, which as this section aims to clarify, is often imprecise and it may be confusing. For example, discussing “abstraction” as an aesthetic concept is particularly challenging in an embodied discipline such as dance, especially if the word “abstract” is understood as “non-representational”, as is often the case in the visual arts. As dance scholars Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Ana Sanchez-Colberg observed, even dance described as “formalist” cannot be content-less

“because it is danced by a person” (2002, 67). In Western theatre, however, the term “abstract” most often is not associated with the deconstruction of the human figure, but rather frequently refers to decomposition of linear narratives. As theatre scholar Daniel Meyer-Dinkgraeffe proposes, “abstractionism” in the theatre most often stands for “a decidedly episodic structure in contrast to the causally stringent development of events” (2005, 58). A similar qualification may be applied to dance and, in this sense, the terms “non-narrative” and “plotless” may be more suitable. However, there is a number of issues in this sense too. Meyer-Dinkgraeffe’s useful definition, for instance, does not fit with all dances. For example, one may remember Ballets Russes avant-garde experiments such as the 1917 *Parade*, where a narrative pretext was combined with Picasso’s cubist constructions, which obscured the dancers’ bodies. A careful use of terms is thus clearly very important, and this section examines several key concepts, all potentially useful for the discussions in this study.

Some twentieth-century theorists suggest the terms such as “formalist” or “pure dance”<sup>1</sup> for the discussion of plotless ballets. It could be argued that this is accurate, as some leotard ballets (particularly in the mid-twentieth century) related to the modernist curiosity about aesthetic potentials of structural elements and the mediums inherent in a given art form. Such ideas emerged in other arts, such as formalist literature, music and fine arts,<sup>2</sup> and were championed by early twentieth-century theorists including Clement Greenberg (1961), Clive Bell (2007/1914) and the critic Roger Fry (1963/1956). It is plausible therefore that some “abstract dances” signify the exploration of dance material in self-referential sense, for example exploring the movement in its relationships to music and space. As Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg propose, such works may be pointing our

attention towards “what the performer gives off as a personality”, which is then added to the choreographic work through “performative layers” (2002, 67).

How these ideas are read by the spectator is a different matter altogether. This is why each of the terms above seems equally limited. As Brandstetter suggests, the very presence of the human “figure” in dance inevitably opens possibilities for representation (1998, 37), and so the possibility of a narrative is also unavoidable. In fact, in dance, the representational character of the body and its movements attracted more theorists than did the contemplation of abstraction. For example, Rudolf Laban and his followers in the 1940s onward<sup>3</sup> began to explore the symbolism of human movement. Later ideas — for example Judith Lynne Hanna’s *To Dance Is Human: A Theory of Non-verbal Communication* (1979) — proposed a semantic grid for the decoding of meanings projected by the movement in different dance contexts. Aesthetic theorists Francis Sparshott (1985) and David Carr (1987) analysed the emergence of meaning behind human movement that occurs within contextual interrelationships between the body and various theatrical elements on stage.

In ballet, the term “abstraction” has been both enticing and contested at different times and within different creative frameworks. The two choreographers in this study seem to have had dissimilar dispositions about this topic. It is well documented that Balanchine disputed the use of the term “abstraction” when applied to his dances (see, for example, Brockway, 1984), yet Forsythe was reportedly attracted to the concept during at least a short period of his career (in the early 2000s). According to Rebecca Groves, a Ballett Frankfurt dramaturge in the period, Forsythe proposed the concept as the unifying principle for his

mixed programme of 2002, where “parallel changing models and modes of abstraction could be seen in three choreographies being presented from very different points in Forsythe’s career” (2003, 3).

Forsythe’s investigation of abstraction indicates something that visual art theorists have maintained throughout the last half of the twentieth century: “abstraction” in art is not a “monolith concept”, as suggested by Anna Moszynska (1990, 11). In the twentieth century, art historians and visual theorists developed several classifications of abstraction in relation to pictorial objects. In addition to Moszynska, various modes of abstraction are proposed by Susanne Langer (1964), Harold Osborne (1979), Frances Colpitt (2002), and Briony Fer (1997). In art theory, some still view “abstraction” in terms of appearances of non-representationalism, but many more theorise it as a mode of communication. Contemporary visual arts theorists more often speak of art objects as “states of encounter”, as proposed by Nicolas Bourriaud (2002/1998, 18). The communicational potentials of art objects are emphasised in such views, and the importance is given to the interaction with the viewer in various contextual relationships. Furthermore, as Fer argued, even when abstract painters aimed to expel human body from the picture, at least one body always remained present in the scene – “that of the spectator” (1997, 10).

In dance discourse, such ideas are noted most often in passing. One of the most highly formulated definitions is made by Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg, who observe two major categories of “abstract dances” (2002, 66). One category involves ideas of disembodiment, as for example in Oskar Schlemmer’s theatrical experiments in the Bauhaus, or Alvin Nikolais’s modernist costume-lighting explorations that obscure the

body. In the second (very broad) category, Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg group together all other appearances of dance abstraction. So-called “pure dance” category thus includes choreography where the stress is placed on the human movement material, and references to stories, plots and characters are understated.

As these discussions in dance theory tend merely to indicate differences, visual art theories are more useful for clarifying the terminology relevant to leotard ballets. Most art theorists accept that one meaning of “abstraction” refers to the idea of “deriving from”, as in “abstracting specific characteristics” of the subject/object and producing in turn stylised visual symbols (Langer, 1964, 379). For the purposes of this thesis, which focuses on works where the human figure is not hidden, but rather the body and its movements are actually accentuated by the spare stage and costume design, this meaning is more interesting.

In particular, Harold Osborne’s (1979) detailed analysis of the modes of abstraction makes a distinction between two larger sub-categories (“syntactic/non-iconic” and “semantic” abstraction) and each of these contains several smaller sub-groups. Interesting parallels may be found between leotard ballets and one of the varieties of Osborne’s concept of “semantic abstraction”. Osborne proposes that, in contrast with syntactic abstraction,<sup>4</sup> the semantic mode always refers to figurative objects, but manifests itself as incomplete information about the representational object (1976a, 243). This may be seen in cases when some data about the subject is omitted or downplayed in order to emphasise a different property of the subject/object. In this sense, parallels could be drawn between all modes of Osborne’s semantic abstraction and various plotless dances. For example, ‘generic’

semantic type is a mode where visual images depict figurative objects by emphasising “characteristic physiognomic traits of the subject” (for example, in schematic textbooks a generic drawing of a rose is intended to represent the species, and not an individual specimen) (Osborne, 1976a, 347). In ballet, similar mode may be observed in plotless nineteenth-century divertissements which feature types of roles (jesters, peasants, friends...) but do not contextualise them within a story, or present them as individual personalities. Equally, this mode may be recognised in Balanchine’s plotless “neo-imperial” ballets (such as 1945 *Theme and Variations*, or 1947 *Symphony in C*). As Garafola proposes, these works celebrate character types — feminine properties of the type — a “classical ballerina,” rather than a particular woman, or an individual ballerina character (2005, 243). But for the leotard ballets, another of Osborne’s modes is more relevant. This is the sub-mode of semantic abstraction in which information or referential detail about a subject is deliberately omitted in order to emphasise or “enhance” certain formal “properties of the work itself” (Osborne, 1976a, 246-250). Osborne finds this mode in caricatures, road signs, and architects’ drawings — the kinds of images where the level of detail is reduced to emphasise a particular message or idea more clearly and strongly.

A certain similarity may be recognised with ballets in this study. Leotard ballets do present a human figure (the dancer), but the contextual information — references to characters, places, times and the context of a plot — is reduced in order to accentuate a specific structural idea, message or relationship. As an illustration, consider Balanchine’s twelve-note ballets from the 1950s and 1960s that focus the viewer’s attention on the intricacies of the musical structure, while any references to characters and stories are substantially played down. Historian Malcolm McCormick suggested that in these works the viewer’s

focus is directed towards the movement material and the structural elements within the dance (1996). Dance writer Joan Acocella proposed that in these works editing out elaborate costuming and the strategic use of simple lighting in the place of set design relates to the choreographic aim of moving the dance toward abstraction (1993, 126). In Forsythe's works, too, a kind of embodied movement research that develops in the stage performances (for example, in the improvisational sections at the opening of the *Steptext*, or in the female lead solo in *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated*, 1987) can be read more clearly because the viewer is focusing on the body and its movement and the dancer, arguably, is not perceived as a particular character in a fictional or everyday event or situation.

As interesting as the term "abstract" in Osborne sense may be, it is still not sufficient to explain all aspects of ballets analysed in this study. This is why other terms including "plot"/"plotless", "narrative", and "characters" are useful, but require just as careful positioning. Among them, particularly the term "non-narrative" seems self-explanatory, but in fact is ambiguous, as many contemporary theories reveal. For example, cultural theorist Mieke Bal in her theory of narrative uses the term "non-narrative" to explain the aspects of art works (in her case literary texts) that have no sense of unfolding story-line. As Bal says, non-narrative parts of the texts are those that have "no story associated" with them (2009, 64). The difficulty is, as Bal herself notes, that these "non-narrative" sections of a text often carry "ideological statements" (2009, 31-32). Bal's analysis of children's poetry clearly illustrates how such "ideological statements" may easily include a sense of an underlying, even covert, meaning and perhaps even amplify the sense of narrative effects.<sup>5</sup> As Bal finds, while "the fabula" may be absent, the "non-narrative" parts of the text nevertheless may reveal strong "opinions" (2009, 31-32).

As theorist Rick Altman reminds us, although most definitions of narrative in the twentieth century include the notion of an event, a group of images, or actions, that appears as a continual chain of connected developments with a clear beginning, middle and an end (2008, 6). Altman makes a useful distinction: there are occurrences that do not read as story-like events: “In scientific terms, there is no doubt that sunshine requires the action of heat-producing explosions.” But, in a text, the *sun’s shining* does not necessarily produce a sense of narrative, but rather provides the effect of “no more than atmosphere.” This is in contrast with, for instance, “a story of sun’s decision to continue shining in spite of humanity’s wrongdoing” (Altman, 2008, 11). While this is a very important distinction, the problem here is that the term “narrative” sometimes still refers to underlying meanings.<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes in his influential semiotic analysis of structural levels in “the narrative” proclaims: “[T]here is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative” (1977/1966, 79). Barthes explains how various possible correlations of the structural levels produce different meanings (1977/1966, 84) and engages with Tzvetan Todorov’s earlier investigation of Russian formalism in literature to develop his complex theory in which “the narrative” involves at least two levels — the story (the logic of actions), and the discourse (“comprising tenses, aspects, and modes” of narrative). In this sense, narrative readings cannot be avoided: even in the works where the first level may be missing, the work could still be read for meanings through underlying “discursive” narratives. The reasons above explain why the term “non-narrative” is difficult for this thesis, even if the term is most often used in dance to denote Barthes’s first level (the continual story). In leotard ballets typically this is the narrative which may be undefined or not present.



The lack of dramatic “characters”, as was implied in Balanchine’s retort to dancer Franklin (cited on pp.1-2), is an equally important issue to be clarified. In this study, the term “character” is understood drawing upon the theories of Altman and Bal, both of whom differentiate between the “actor” [the agent] and the “character” [the carrier of the plot] in the theatre. In contrast with the “actor”, Bal sees the “character” as “the most crucial category of narrative”. “Characters” are “anthropomorphic figures provided with specifying features” and their “distinctive characteristics together create the effect of a character” (Bal, 2009, 113). Bal warns us that, as opposed to real people, “characters do not exist”. Rather, they are created through narratives which “produce ‘character-effects’” (Bal, 2009, 113).

The character-effect occurs when the resemblance between human beings and fabricated figures is so great that we forget the fundamental difference: we even go so far as to identify with the character, to cry, to laugh, and to search for or with it, or even against it (Bal, 2009, 113).

Altman makes a similar point about the difference between the “actor” and the “character”, seeing the latter as “one level removed” from the medium of performance, and in this sense different from the former (2008, 12-13). The person we see on stage does not act as a “character” until s/he assumes a set of characteristics required by a narrative. For instance, the iconic theatre actress Sarah Bernhardt may be perceived on a stage, but she is not a character until she assumes properties of it. “She may laugh and cry or rant and rave, but she remains an actress and not a character. When she speaks, it is the body of Sarah Bernhardt that speaks” (Altman, 2008, 12). “Once she becomes Camille..., however, Sarah Bernhardt is no longer the agent of her actions. Now the agent is another entity, separate from the actress” and existing one step removed from the medium of her performance

(2008, 12-13). This is a point that may be illustrated in leotard ballets. Although spectators may project the “character” attributes to the performer developing their own ideas about the set of individual characteristics, in the Bal and Altman sense, ballets in this research do not feature “characters”, but rather show dancers as “actors” [or agents] who carry out the event.

With the complex issues above, the term “plotless” emerges as a clearer denotation of leotard ballets in this study. Those ballets certainly have chains of dance events, and possible discursive narratives, covert meanings, opinions and ideologies, but do not necessarily deal with characters and a linear story. Although “plot” as a term can be used in various ways too, all current definitions in one way or another still relate to the concept of story and its interdependence with characters. As philosopher Paul Ricoeur explains, leading from the Aristotelian concept <sup>7</sup>, the term “plot was first defined, on the most formal level, as an integrating dynamism that draws a unified and complete story from a variety of incidents” (1985, 8). Although, as Ricoeur explains, this notion changes with the modernist forms (the character may “overtake that of plot, becoming equal with it” and perhaps also surpassing it<sup>8</sup>), the definitions of “plot” always discuss some form of relationship between story and character.<sup>9</sup> The term “plotlessness”, although not analysed as fully by the theorists<sup>10</sup>, is thus more interesting for the works in this study because it can be understood as a lack of the unity in the dramatic events in combination with the diminished idea of “characters”.

In this section, therefore, I explain why ballets in this study are referred to as “plotless”, and in a particular sense “abstract”, thus relating to the device of “abstracting” particular

details and aesthetic properties in order to emphasise other structural elements as more important, as explained in Osborne's theory of semantic abstraction. It is equally recognised that within any dance where the plot seems diminished, omitted or defragmented (in Mayer-Dinkgraeffe's sense), as is the case with the works in this study, there still may be underlying narratives in the "discursive" sense (Barthes, 1977). The terms "character" and "narrative" in this study are considered useful, particularly in the analyses in the later chapters (4, 5 and 6), where performers' individual readings and approaches in their roles may imply such meanings.

## 1.2 THE EMERGENCE OF PLOTLESS BALLETS AND THE EFFECT ON THE DANCER'S ROLE

As Selma Jeanne Cohen (1983/1953), André Levinson (1983/1927) and Susan Leigh Foster (1998) explain in detail, plot-lines and stories are deeply rooted in the heritage of ballet. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ballet masters aspired to elevate the art form (at that time regarded as an uncultivated, purely corporeal entertainment) to the level of high arts, such as drama.<sup>11</sup> As Judith Chazin-Bennahum, (1983, 170) and John Chapman (1988, 367) discussed in their historical analyses, dance, it was believed, should always offer something to the mind, rather than just please the eye and ear. As a result, the eighteenth century conception of *ballet d'action*<sup>12</sup> signified the peak of dance intellectualism, producing sophisticated narrative ballets that functioned as "silent dramas" or "wordless plays" (see Chapman, 1988, 375; and Nye, 2011). This conceptualisation fully took shape during the eighteenth century in Jean-Georges Noverre's influential *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets* (1760), which advocated an integration of dance forms "with the art of acting" (cited in Nye, 2011, 86). In such an arrangement, as Foster

notes, ballet masters had to become convincing dramatists, while the dancer's artistry was most admired when their storytelling was as sophisticated as the art of theatre actors (1998, 70).

The opposite trend, where aesthetic movement properties were emphasised, thus leading the focus away from the story, can be traced to particular moments of change in the history of ballet. For example, the changes in audience's tastes after the French Revolution of 1789-1799 dictated a shift in aesthetic appreciation that favoured movement over narrative content.<sup>13</sup> Later too, influential Romantic critics, led by Théophile Gautier, regarded the expressive potential of movement as the only "eternal subject of ballet" and viewed storytelling as just a structural vehicle for the dancing (Chapman, 1988, 373). While the ballets still had strong narratives, some of the first roles that were independent of the storyline emerged in dance divertissements in eighteenth-century operas. As intermezzi within the narrative, these short dance suites that were further developed in full-evening nineteenth-century romantic and classical ballets still had indications of types of persons dancing in particular narrative contexts. The divertissements therefore featured plotless roles for soloists and demi-soloists, usually clearly referencing specific generic types (ethnic, character or professional affiliations such as peasants or fishermen, or fantastic creatures such as fairies or ghosts). Sometimes these roles included what theorist Peter Goldie describes as general "personality traits" (2004, 29-32), again referring to specific type: a joker, a friend, a fisherman, but there was no narrative (in Altman's, 2008 sense of the term). These roles were often assumed by the character dancers, while the lead roles still had fully developed characters, instrumental to the story (at that time they often integrated mime into movement).

One of the earliest ballets where principal dancers performed roles without characters was Jules Perrault's storyless dance suite *Pas de quatre* (1845).<sup>14</sup> As scholar Lincoln Kirstein proposes, this was "perhaps [the] first deliberately 'abstract' ballet whose subject was *danse d'école* itself, without apology, autonomous and absolute" (1970, 158). Lithographs show the dancers in traditional ballet costumes (reminiscent of sylph roles), but the four star ballerinas danced outside of character. *Pas de quatre*, however, remained an exception, rather than the beginning of a new trend, and it did not influence the major change in the form of ballet roles.

The trend of featuring plotless roles for principal ballet dancers was a twentieth-century product. As explained in the previous section, twentieth-century ballet was marked by the emergence of new trends, including conceptual explorations in plotless dance idioms (epitomised by Michel Fokine's 1909 version of *Les Sylphides*<sup>15</sup>). But it seems that the use of metaphoric imagery was still a more prevalent method for the dancers. The idea that the performers may appear on stage as themselves, and not as characters, was explored more widely early in the century in the avant-garde theatre. (As Meyer-Dinkgraeffe explains, Dada experiments between 1907-1920s<sup>16</sup> introduced this type of exploration for theatre actors, 2005, 60-63). However, even by the middle of the century, ballet dancers still did not see dancing outside the characters as a common occurrence, as indicated by Franklin's previously cited recollection (pp.1-2).

Almost simultaneously, the same period marked the elevation of the role of the choreographer who was then positioned as the artistic author (or, in Diaghilev's time, the

co-author with the composer and designer of the dance work). As dance historian Lynn Garafola explains, owing to a complex production system, the “dancemaking art” of the Diaghilev era was reconfigured “into the new ballet star system,” introducing a new establishment of authorship in ballet (1986, 198). These new market conditions transformed the role of an (opera) house ballet master (a dance coordinator of sorts, whose array of duties included arranging dances, performing, teaching, staging and administration) into a sought-after “modern-day ballet choreographer” (Garafola, 1989, 196). This shift had implications for the dancer’s work as well. While during the nineteenth century it was not uncommon for parts of a ballet choreography to be altered to accommodate the preferences of particular star dancers, the artistic powers now shifted. Although there were a few capricious star dancers who maintained their position despite these developments, the role of the choreographer significantly impacted on the scope of the dancer’s role in the twentieth century ballet.

This new establishment allowed for the perpetuation and integrity of the choreographic style, where the choreographer’s individual movement approach becomes one of the core measures of a dance work’s integrity. This greater creative power allowed the choreographer to conceptualise dances more broadly than had been the case in previous centuries. For example, nineteenth-century dances (prior to Petipa’s collaboration with Tchaikovsky) were often composed to popular, but frequently unsophisticated, musical arrangements. Stephanie Jordan reminds us that twentieth-century modernism induced the “stabilisation of the dance work as an independent conceptual entity,” featuring ballets with a “relatively fixed form, devised by one acknowledged choreographer and usually one

composer” (2000, 4). This modernist trend, Jordan explains, marked the emergence of musically-driven choreography.<sup>17</sup>

Now a ballet could have a narrative but it could also be plotless and therefore, in a fundamental sense, “about” its music (2000, 4).

As demonstrated by Sonia Schoonejans, the later decades of the twentieth century opened multiple exploratory avenues within the domain of ballet-based abstract dance (1992). While this opens up many interesting research areas, it is pertinent that this study retains its focus on the ways in which the dancer’s role may have changed in the transition between narrative and plotless dances.

### 1.3 THE DANCER’S CREATIVE PROCESS: NARRATIVE AND ABSTRACT ROLES

When Fokine’s famous, critical letter contested the performing tradition of superficially transplanting mime and technical feats on top of the story, he was indirectly urging a return to Noverre’s principles regarding the integration of movement and narrative (1983/1914, 260). He emphasised that the dancer should employ the whole body “from head to foot” to convey a character (1983/1914, 260). Ballerina Alicia Markova, who worked with Fokine on a revival of the 1907 solo *The Dying Swan*, explained how this approach translated into the dancer’s role. From the dancer’s perspective, the steps were choreographed in a manner that enabled Markova to feel she would become the character (a swan) during their execution. The movements made Markova feel “as if the swan were trying to fly but could not, and in the control of the effects that he [Fokine] wanted there lay all the difficulties of this short, intense drama” (Markova, 1986, 98).

The example is relevant to the aforementioned “stabilisation” of the choreographic entity of the dance work (Jordan, 2000, 2). While Garafola explains that Fokine worked collaboratively with his dancers (1986, 46), Markova reveals that the performer was required to follow the choreographic idea carefully. If the steps were performed with all the nuances requested by the choreographer, the story emerged. According to Garafola, although the dancers’ artistry was important, the performers were required to “present themselves, not as interpreters, but as embodiments of their roles” (1989, 87).

Even in the context of different choreographic approaches, it seems that narrative roles generally gave the performer a great sense of structure. For example, in the role of the Chosen Maiden in Nijinsky’s *Le Sacre du printemps* (1913), the dancer originally cast (the choreographer’s sister, Bronislava), found that various components of the dance and its design informed her performing approach. As Nijinska explained, movement in relationship with the music was fused with references to the event, time and place found in the story and in the visual design: “As I danced I imagined above me the dark clouds in the stormy sky, remembered from the painting by Roerich” (1981, 450). Nijinska also thought about “the primitiveness of the tribal rites, where the Chosen Maiden must die to save the earth” (1981, 450). Lydia Sokolova, another Ballets Russes soloist who danced the role of the Chosen Maiden in a subsequent version choreographed by Léonide Massine in 1920, explained how she grappled with the complexity of multitasking: trying to capture musical expression (dancing to very difficult musical counts) while simultaneously building a compelling, tragic character. “I had not only to do my fearful movements ... but I had to keep thinking, acting and counting all at once” (Sokolova and Buckle, 1960, 166).



Aesthetic theorist Carole Hamby suggests that a dancer in storytelling ballets “needs to be imaginatively and critically aware of the dance in terms of narrative and dramatic aspects” but also has to be aware of “the formal structure of the dance design” (1984, 43). When a ballet has an unfolding storyline, which serves as a frame for the dramatic action, “the dancer must see the phases of his or her dancing as meaningful within the context of characterisation and narration” (1984, 41). Sokolova’s and Nijinska’s examples illustrate how twentieth-century modernist ballets often combined the requirements of characterisation with powerful formal construction built around the intricate interpretation of music.

In contrast, ballets without plot-lines seemed to offer more freedom, or at least the illusion of freedom. Farrell, for example, explained (in Farrell and Daniel, 1993b) that she preferred the freedom allowed by storyless roles, as she did not feel constricted by character portrayal. For Farrell, for example, the concept of “becoming a character” would not allow all possibilities “that are opened to the moment when you actually get out on stage, and dance to that music, assume those qualities” (1993b). But as Franklin’s example showed, it may have been the lack of this narrative structure that had surprised and even troubled some dancers. As dance scholar Geraldine Morris explains, while most ballet dancers are familiar with “the idea of character interpretation,” few have considered its contribution in the response to the layers of movement, not realising that such an approach may bring them liberation “from the strictures of the codified movement” (2000, 281).

The opposite reaction to Farrell, for instance, is found in the autobiographical account of former New York City Ballet ballerina Gelsey Kirkland, who notoriously rebelled against

the very concept of (Balanchine's) plotless ballets. Not satisfied with what she perceived as the aestheticism of movement divorced from meaning, Kirkland viewed Balanchine's ballets as mechanical and dehumanised (1986, 94). To motivate herself to perform such works, Kirkland resorted to imagination — in one work she coordinated breath patterning with the imagined “shaft of light coming into the bare stage”.<sup>18</sup> In *Concerto Barocco* (1941) she found the “meaning” of the duet by discovering alternative “physical accents” in opposition to what she saw as robotic, metronomic adherence to the beat (1986, 90). To Kirkland, finding ways to rebel against Balanchine's choreography represented “a distinction between human being and machine” (1986, 94-95). While there are no other dancers on record with equally strong critical reactions, there are performers in ballet today who express their preference for dramatic/narrative roles. For example, a principal dancer of the English National Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada, Zdenek Konvalina, recently explained his preference for “dramatic roles” because they “say something” (2011, online).<sup>19</sup> Although she did not speak in terms of preferences for different types of roles, Canadian ballerina Martine Lamy explained to me that the roles she can “really remember well” are the dramatic ones. “Like *Onegin*, like *Giselle*... My first *Giselle* I will never forget. it was such an amazing experience to go through that deep emotional attachment to a story line... I just always loved having a real story, with real characters to build by dancing...” (Lamy, 15 April, 2011).

Hamby recognises a clear distinction between these two types of roles (1984, 41). While acknowledging that all dances require the performer's expression and appreciation of movement design, Hamby views the process in story ballets as comparable with the task of theatre actors, while plotless roles are similar to musicians' interpretations of composed

scores. Leotard ballets or practice-clothes works, in this sense, provide a particularly interesting terrain.

#### 1.4 LEOTARD BALLETS: THE SUB-GENRE AND ITS DISTINCT ISSUES

Several vernacular terms are used in discussions of “leotard ballets” in the field. In addition to “practice-clothes” dances, scholars and historians also sometimes refer to “leotard ballets” and, in Balanchine’s case, the “black and white ballets”. All these terms refer to the habitual practice attire that dancers in ballet cultures use during studio rehearsals and which functions in the place of costuming in these works. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the costume has the central importance for the definition of the genre. As established in 1.1, these works also tend to stand out for their spare aesthetic and the absence of elaborate theatrical elements. Although there are several articles that discuss the use of leotards as costumes within the historical context of practice clothing in dance (Moore, 1945 and 1960; and Au, 2005/1998), the sub-genre, and its aesthetic, its implications for the choreography and the dancer have not yet been fully analysed.

First, it is important to clarify that not all practice clothes are leotards, just as not all leotards are practice clothes. Sometimes leotards are more sophisticatedly designed, as in Gianni Versace’s high-fashion designs for Forsythe’s *Herman Schmerman*, 1992. At other times, practice-clothes ballets may include the use of loose shirts and street-wear as in Stephen Galloway’s designs for Forsythe’s *workwithinwork*, 1998. Upon closer scrutiny, it is also easily discernible that the range of costumes designed in the style of leotards and body tights grew quite diverse in the twentieth century, ranging from Balanchine’s spare

black and white practice-clothes look, to very ornately decorated unitards that invoke fantastic themes and sometimes characters (for example, Nadine Baylis's designs for ballets by Glen Tetley or Barry Moreland).<sup>20</sup> While unitards also have distinct lineage,<sup>21</sup> this thesis is focused only on the pared-down leotard ballets costumed in the style of practice dress, as used in rehearsals or ballet classrooms. These are the works that project fewest references to characters and stories, and where lead roles have the least similarity to narrative roles. Thus, throughout this thesis, the term "leotard ballet" will only refer to this aesthetic.

Balanchine created the earliest practice-clothes ballets, which remain in the repertory to this day.<sup>22</sup> As explained in the online catalogue of The George Balanchine Foundation (2007), the originally elaborately designed *Concerto Barocco* of 1941, on entering the repertory of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in 1945, was revised so that the performers "were dressed in practice clothes..." (leotards, with short chiffon skirts). At that time, the costumes were all black; they were changed into the ultimate all-white appearance in 1952. As Jordan explains, the aesthetic of black-and-white ballets reached its peak during the late 1950s in Balanchine's famous experimentations with highly formal "serial" or "twelve-note" musical scores, as in *Agon* (1957), *Episodes* (1959) or *Movements for Piano and Orchestra* (1963) (Jordan, 2007, 163-164). Particularly in Balanchine's practice-clothes ballets, the relationship between movement and music (or sound) or other structural elements of the choreography came to the fore.

According to Holly Hynes, the costume designer of several twenty-first century leotard ballets (including Christopher Wheeldon's *Polyphonia*, 2001), although these works

appear to be very simply designed, they are very difficult to stage and revive. The small details and alterations are much more visible against the spare aesthetic, which may impact upon the identity of the work (Hynes, interview, 24 October 2010). I would extend this point to include the dancing: because leotard ballets are so spare, subtle changes in dancing stand out much more clearly and have a greater impact on the choreographic text.<sup>23</sup> The dancer may arguably feel quite restricted, rather than free, in some of these works.

Furthermore, the high level of body exposure in close-fitting practice dress elicits references to nudity. Sparshott suggests that monochromatic, close-fitting costume reveals even more movement than the bare body (1995, 306). He argues that the articulation of movement is aided by the simple cloth fitted over the dancer's body, while the nudity of "a flexible torso with four pivoting limbs, plus head and neck"... "risks destroying this articulation". As an example of the visual clarity, Sparshott singles out Balanchine's "reduction of costume to a close-fitting sheath of black and white" which "made the dancing body entirely visible without unseemly direction of the attention" (1995, 306). In fact, according to Sparshott, through its "approximation" of nudity, Balanchine promotes "austerity of the flesh, making of the body a pure agency of dance" (1995, 304).<sup>24</sup> In some cases, this simplicity and body visibility indeed accentuates the sense of athleticism and the mobility of the body.<sup>25</sup> But the sense of the body's exposure may affect the dancer's feelings and process in these works.

As the anecdotal reports show, the revealing costumes indeed affected the stage experiences of dancers. This was particularly evident in the early leotard ballets. In Massine's *Ode* (1928), for instance, the performers noted a great change in the experience

of movement in the bright, close-fitting costumes. As recorded by Garafola, ballerina Felia Doubrovskaya felt inspired as the unitards elucidated the “formal rhythmic beauty” of the choreography (2005, 77). In contrast, another cast member Alexandra Danilova had a more unsettling feeling of extreme self-consciousness. She explained that many dancers in *Ode* felt “so naked” that they wore dressing gowns over the costumes “until the moment before the curtain went up” (1986, 175). Nevertheless, from an aesthetic perspective, Danilova could also appreciate the choreographic rationale behind the use of this type of costume as there was a direct correlation between the costume and the movement:

... costumes were part of choreography – we would run and our skirts would flow behind us, giving our running an ethereal quality. In a leotard, that same running looks different, often, a leotard obliges you to move differently (Danilova, 1986, 174).

Todd Bolender, the original soloist in the “Phlegmatic” section of Balanchine’s 1946 *Four Temperaments*, felt greatly relieved when Balanchine decided to strip back ostentatious costumes by Kurt Seligmann (in the redesigned version of 1951). Bolender recalled difficulties when performing in the original heavy, woollen costume which would soak with perspiration very quickly during performance. Seligmann’s novel design also included a soft-brimmed mushroom-shaped hat that obstructed the dancer’s view of the stage. This is why in Balanchine’s dressed-down “design” Bolender felt truly free: “I felt that I could soar more,” he claimed, even though the role does not require much virtuosity or high, soaring jumps (Bolender cited in Tomic-Vajagic, 2005, 46).

While Balanchine often played down the decision to strip down certain ballets, by attributing it to the evident economic benefits, the artistic intention was also a crucial motivation for the use of leotards. The label “black and white” is particularly telling.

Referring to the colours of the costumes, it points out the graphic contrast between achromatic tones that serves as an additional device for the structural visualisations of music. Due to the body movement, through daring kinetic combinations the costumes sometimes created contrasting, checkered visual images, as in the “Pas de deux” of *Agon*. Famous photographs by Martha Swope, show the original dancers Diana Adams and Arthur Mitchell — the woman is in a deep *penchée arabesque* over the kneeling man’s shoulder; their tops of contrasting colours press against one another, and the legs in diverging colour tights, extend in the opposite directions through the space.<sup>26</sup> In this case, even the interracial casting helped the accentuation of the visual contrasts, the device which the original dancer, Arthur Mitchell, understood very well.<sup>27</sup> But, as shown through Kirkland’s example (1.3), not all dancers could read the aesthetic so clearly.

As Kirkland’s example reveals, dancers who do not see clear meanings or references in plotless ballets may resort to their own images and ideas, and these may be completely unrelated to the choreographer’s vision. Balanchine did not discuss roles with the dancers often. Furthermore, dancers who perform these roles in other companies, or later (for example, the new generations of New York City Ballet performers) may develop completely different references that can result in a different performing approach. Rebecca Krohn, a current New York City Ballet principal dancer, explained in a recent online interview (New York City Ballet, 2009, online) that in the *Movements for Piano and Orchestra* “the lack of scenery, or story or costumes” increased her freedom “to create” new “dynamics” in the relationship with her partner. Krohn found this approach through watching the conductor give particular cues around the abrupt stops and pauses in the score.

Another aspect of the aesthetics is the sense of uniform appearance — in leotard works all, or most dancers wear very similar, or related clothing. With the exception of Forsythe's *Steptext*, where the dancers wear different colour and style of practice clothes, the works examined in this thesis have this type of aesthetic. Such costuming may suggest the connection between the theatrical product — the performance — with the process that develops backstage.<sup>28</sup> Historically, the trend of using body suits in ballet coincided with the popularity of tricot and body tights as rehearsal attire.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, leotard costume and rehearsal-wear may offer the viewers the feeling that they are somehow witnessing the creative process, being privy to the insider knowledge. For the dancer, wearing uniform practice clothing may evoke memories of ballet-school dress. In the typically hierarchical system of a ballet company, this uniform costume may appear to level the field for the dancers, as it refers to a community rather than a hierarchy. Notably, as Sparshott points out, the use of costume in the theatre traditionally introduces connotations of social hierarchy, in a narrative sense, while nudity suspends it (1995, 306). This point could be extended to practice-clothes ballets. In Balanchine's so-called "no star system" there was still a fairly clear sense of differentiation between the principal roles. In Forsythe's choreography, however, the roles for the soloists and the ensemble are often blended (as in *the second detail* where soloists break out from the group only occasionally).

The discussion above shows why leotard ballets should be seen as a specific sub-genre of twentieth- and twenty-first century plotless ballet. For this research it is important that their particular set of issues can influence the dancers' creative process and performances in various ways, as will be discussed in the two case studies. In the following chapter I



explain how the methodology utilised in this study is devised specifically in order to create the appropriate tools for such an investigation.

## 1.5 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 1

The dancers' roles in leotard ballets are seen in the context and lineage of abstract and plotless dance. The "abstraction" in these dances is understood according to Osborne's (1979) mode of semantic abstraction, where stripping down particular information about figures, characters and situations accentuates particular nexial relationships. As also discussed in 1.1, "plotlessness" in these ballets is discussed as the lack of unified succession of dramatic events and "characters" as carriers of a story-line. In the tradition of plotless ballet the dancers' roles started differing from those in story ballets (1.2, 1.3). The leotard ballet sub-genre involves quite a specific set of conditions, including performing in costumes that reveal body shape, where the finer details of movement are more obvious. The themes of movement, athleticism and the connection to non-hierarchical social constructs, as well as the backstage process and vernacular ballet culture, frame this genre and the role of the dancer within it (1.4).

The brief overview of existing published accounts suggests that this unique framework — the lack of plot, characters, phenomenal experience of mobility, body exposure, and close connection to music — influences the dancers' process. This process is further complicated in relation to the scope of authorship in the ballet, where the space for the dancer's input is narrow. One of the core investigations of this thesis explores how and in what ways the

dancer contributes to the ballet's authorship in such restricted spaces, and how this contribution is then visible to the spectator in the context of abstract leotard ballets.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 1:

<sup>1</sup> As Garafola explains some of the early twentieth-century dances were described by their creators as “pure dances for the senses and intellect” (2005, 77). Theorist David Michael Levin (1976) examines Balanchine's works by using theories of formalists Clement Greenberg and Michel Fried to argue for the “formalism” of Balanchine's choreography, by inspecting the use of weight in the choreography. In her contemplation of dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, Selma Jeanne Cohen pleaded, “Can't a dance just be,” and “simply exist to be enjoyed for the pleasure of our remarking the relationships of movement to music, of the constantly changing yet somehow consistent patterns traced in space; ... Isn't this 'meaning' enough ...?” (1981, 281-282)

<sup>2</sup> The exploration of abstraction as a visual concept developed early in the twentieth-century, as it can be followed in the influential writings of painter Vassily Kandinsky (*Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 1912). Historian Olga Taxidou explains that one of the first experiments with abstraction in the theatre came from Kandinsky's idea for “The Yellow Sound—A Stage Composition”, “a purely abstract theatre” play where the “music, movement and colour” would function as structuring units for “a plotless, actionless and ‘idea-less’ theatre” (1998, 59-60). The concept of abstraction influenced ballet in various ways, as it can be followed through the history of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes: Fokine's plotless *Les Sylphides* (1909) and narrative ballets with abstract visual elements (Picasso-designed *Parade*, 1917, or Naum Gabo's scenography for *La Chatte*, 1927) are some examples. Cubo-futurist abstraction in pre-revolutionary Russian painting was transposed onto stage in Alexandra Exter and Alexander Tairov's collaboration in Moscow's Kamerny [Chamber] theatre (see Roman and Marquardt, 1992, 3).

<sup>3</sup> During the 1940s and 1950s, a new application of Laban's movement theory was developed by his disciple Warren Lamb who explored symbolism in human movement in his Movement Pattern Analysis, a theory that is not limited to dance movement.

<sup>4</sup> “Non-iconic” or “syntactic” abstraction refers to so-called non-objective (or non-figurative/non-representational) abstract works, as in Malevich's suprematist square paintings or Pollock's abstract expressionism. Such pictorial objects, Osborne argues, can be seen as self-referential, not transmitting “information about anything in the world apart from themselves” (1976a, 243).

<sup>5</sup> Bal examines a Dutch children poem, “Danny Goes Shopping” by L. Roggeveen, where the certain lines have “no events presented”, yet use the terms such as “fortunately”, or “of course”, still reveals the author's opinions and thus gives us a sense of a covert ideological narrative.

<sup>6</sup> The current (2012) version of the *Oxford Dictionaries Online* among its definitions of narrative gives the following as the third entry: [narrative is] “a representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values: the coalition's carefully constructed narrative about its sensitivity to recession victims”. *Oxford University Press Online* (2012), accessed at: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/narrative>

<sup>7</sup> The term is discussed in sixth chapter of Aristotle's *Poetics* (as translated by Stephen Halliwell, 1995, Cambridge: Loeb's Classical Library, pp.61-65).

<sup>8</sup> “In this sense, the modern novel teaches us to extend the notion of an imitated or represented action to the point where we can say that a formal principle of composition governs the series of changes affecting beings similar to us — be they individual or collective, the bearers of a proper name as in the nineteenth-century novel, or just designated by an initial (K) as in Kafka, or even, at the limit, unnameable as in Beckett” (Ricoeur, 1985, 10).

<sup>9</sup> In “Problems for English speakers: story, discourse, plot, fabula and sjuzet”, Abbott explains that the term “plot” may be used in several “conflicting” ways. “In common English usage, it refers not to the order of events in the narrative but to its opposite, story. More narrowly, it has been used to mean the shaping principle or dynamic that is revealed in the way the story is held together (Ricoeur, Brooks, Richardson....Phelan’s ‘narrative progression’). Finally it can mean a type of story (as in ‘the revenge plot’)” (2008, 18-19). In H.Porter Abbott, 2008, “Defining Narrative”, in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, pp. 13-27.

<sup>10</sup> “Plotless” as a term is used in film theory to discuss silent films of Russian avant-garde director Sergei Eisenstein (as in Bordwell, 2004) or in literary theory to discuss Beckett’s dramas (for example, John King, 2005, “Reading for the Plotless: the Difficult Characters of Samuel Beckett’s ‘A Dream of Fair to Middling Women’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 29 (1): 133-152).

<sup>11</sup> Early ballet theorist (seventeenth-century Jesuit philosopher and ballet master) Claude-François Ménéstrier, formulated aesthetic requirements of ballet as art form that should “express actions, characters, and passions by means of harmonious rhythms” embodied in the human movement (Carter, 2004/1998, 22).

<sup>12</sup> Eighteenth-century genre *ballet d’action* was based on the elaborate “plot synopsis” integrated with movement and music. John Weaver’s 1717 ballet *The Loves of Mars and Venus* is considered the predecessor of “dramatic dance” as the story was presented through movement and gestural language. (In Edward Nye, 2011, *Mime, Music and Drama on the Eighteenth Century Stage: The Ballet d’action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 45 and 107.) Jean-Georges Noverre published his influential *Lettres sur la danse et les ballets* (1760) outlining strategies for the dancer’s expression of narrative through movement. Agnolini coined the term *danza parlante*, expressing that “the dance must speak”. (In Garafola, Lynn, curator, “Development of Ballet Narrative”, *New York Public Library Legacy: 500 Years of Italian dance*. [exhibition digital catalogue — online, accessed from <http://legacy.www.nypl.org/research/lpa/italiandance/web3.html> ])

<sup>13</sup> Chapman explains how new plebeian French audiences after the French Revolution promoted dance as a form of entertainment — their enthusiasm was for athleticism and virtuosity (and did not require wider contextual knowledge of other disciplines such as literature) (1988, 372). Such a trend influenced the emergence of a new breed of dancer (exemplified by Auguste Vestris), who was still a masterful actor and mime, but now highly regarded for his technical abilities and aesthetic movement displays.

<sup>14</sup> Perrault choreographed a succession of solo and group dances that showcased distinct performing styles of four superlative ballerinas of the day, Marie Taglioni, Carlota Grisi, Fanny Cherito and Lucile Grahm.

<sup>15</sup> While Gorsky’s 1901 *Valse fantasie* was a “purely musical work, without literary or narrative pretext” (Kirstein, 1970, 186), Fokine’s 1909 version of *Les Sylphides*, is the earliest plotless ballet that still remains in international repertory. (*Les Sylphides* was adapted from an earlier choreography *Chopiniana*, Mariinsky Theatre, 1907. *Chopiniana*, however, included narrative themes and poetic metaphors.)

<sup>16</sup> Meyer-Dinkgraeffe explains that “Dadaist artists wanted to develop a new style of theatre” and change “attitudes of spectators” (2005, 60). This new style included the process of “spontaneous acting,” “devoid of any aspect of craft or technique.” “There were no rehearsals,” and the actors “did not play characters on stage, they remained themselves” (2005, 61). The experimentation with the concept — the actors appearing outside of character, was developed further in the futurist avant-garde theatre in Ukraine, where theatre director Les Kurbas produced several versions of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* with actors entering and exiting the stage as themselves, and not as their characters. (See Irena Makaryk, 2004. *Shakespeare in the Undiscovered Bourn: Les Kurbas, Ukrainian Modernism, and Early Soviet Cultural Politics*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.)

<sup>17</sup> It is also important to remember that during this period, international ballet choreographers in France and Russia became aware of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze’s “rhythmic-sensitivity” movement exercises (known as eurhythmics, or ‘plastique’) that showed how music could have “a highly constructive dialogue with dance” (Jordan, 2000, 26, and Souritz, 1990, 169).

<sup>18</sup> Kirkland (1986, 90) in relation to Jacques D’Amboise’s plotless ballet *Tchaikovsky Suite*.

<sup>19</sup> Konvalina’s biographical account is available online through The National Ballet of Canada presentation, accessed at: [http://national.ballet.ca/thecompany/principals/Zdenek\\_Konvalina/#media-video1Container-tab](http://national.ballet.ca/thecompany/principals/Zdenek_Konvalina/#media-video1Container-tab).

<sup>20</sup> Glen Tetley's *Tempest* (1979) for example included dancers wearing body tights, with trailing fabric that produced exotic images in movement. For Moreland's ballet *Journey to Avalon* (1980) Baylis created decorated leotards with elaborate cutouts. (See Victoria and Albert Theatre Collection, "Movement in Stage Costume", accessed at <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/m/movement-in-stage-costume-design>)

<sup>21</sup> "Body tights" are used often as elaborate, decorated designs as in the Ballets Russes Leon Bakst's costume for Nijinsky in *Le spectre de la rose* (1911) or *L'Après midi d'un faune* (1912), Picasso's costumes for the Male Acrobat in Massine's 1917 *Parade*, or Pavel Tchelitchev's designs for Massine's 1928 *Ode*. Many examples are found throughout the ballet repertory: Isamu Noguchi's designs for Balanchine's 1948 *Orpheus*, Ashton's 1965 and 1966 designs for *Monotones I and II*, or Willa Kim's unitards for Tetley's *Sphinx* (1977).

<sup>22</sup> As Kirstein (1971, 218) reminds us, young Balanchine was one of the performers in Lopukhov's 1923 *Tanzsymfonia*, a precedent of symphonic ballet. Its spare aesthetic omitted scenery, and the costume was "reduced to uniform" (Kirstein, 1971, 218). Parts of Nijinska's *Romeo and Juliet* (1926) for the Ballets Russes represented the ballet class, and practice dress was used to depict the part of the narrative. See Garafola (1989, 142) and Victoria Huckenpahler's (1982) "Felja Doubrovska: Imperial Ballerina," *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 5 (4): 361-437.

<sup>23</sup> An interesting discussion about the changes to Balanchine's *Agon* in the Forsythe's production reveals issues about the amount of changes that were too great to preserve the authenticity of the Balanchine aesthetic, as perceived by the George Balanchine Trust. This discussion including opinions by Forsythe and Ellen Sorrin (representing the Balanchine Trust) is described in Witchel's article (1996).

<sup>24</sup> While there is no significant information that reveals Balanchine's interest in the concept of nudity, it is important to remind that one of his early influences (along with Lopukov) was Goleizovsky, who was a participant in post-revolutionary movement that celebrated the aesthetic of the bare body as a symbol of the human in harmony with nature, liberated from the religious dogma. Goleizovsky's experiments featured dancers in the simple briefs and textile bands (in the place of full bodices) — the costumes designed to reveal the supreme plasticity of movement (in Souritz 1990, 182-183).

<sup>25</sup> In this respect, one of the early precedents on the dance stage is found in Coco Chanel's fashionable machine-knitted sportswear — particularly in the swimsuits for male dancers in Nijinska's 1924 *Le train bleu*, where the shape and material anticipated later stretch fabric of practice clothes. (As discussed in e-mail correspondence with Jane Pritchard, 27 October 2010.)

<sup>26</sup> The photograph is published widely — for example, on the cover of Sally Banes's (1998) *Dancing Women, Female Bodies on Stage*, London and New York: Routledge.

<sup>27</sup> The casting of the original *Agon* also brought out deeper political readings, as pale Adams was partnered by the African-American Mitchell. Although Mitchell felt that Balanchine certainly intentionally created a political statement, he also emphasised that the aesthetic aspect was the key: the interracial casting heightened the visual contrasts. "There was a definite use of the skin tones in terms of Diana being so pale and me being so dark, so that even the placing of the hands or the arms provided a color structure integrated into the choreographic one" (Mitchell in Mason, 1991, 395).

<sup>28</sup> Historian Selma Landen Odom (2005/1998) explains that practice dress was used for "student choruses" in Dalcroze's *Orpheus* in 1912 and 1913: "... then-radical leotard was used for the Furies, who filled the stage with their flailing arm motions, and the Blessed Spirits wore the brightly colored kimono-style robes worn between classes by the students at Hellerau".

<sup>29</sup> As Au (2005/1998) finds, the popularity of leotards increased in the 1920's modern dance studio. Early stage examples are found in 1923 and 1924 modern dances by Doris Humphrey.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

#### 2.0 INTRODUCTION: THE BALLET DANCER'S ROLE THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVES OF SPECTATORS AND PERFORMERS

To respond to the core questions outlined in the previous chapter there is a need for a complex vista, one that allows an equal insight into both the internal perspective of the performer and an analytical outside view of the performance. As several theorists, including Sparshott (1985, 104) and Wulff (1998, 107), have acknowledged, the process and experience of performing is different from the experience of observing the act of performance. While both experiences may combine internal and external perspectives (the spectator may also be a performer), in many cases the spectator-analyst lacks the depth of embodied experience of the professional dancer. The dancer's experience will thus include deeper cognitive and embodied understanding of the movement performed. An expert spectator (a critic, dance historian or dance aficionado), however, may develop a very broad referential field, which the performer may lack. The spectator may analyse (from a single, consistent perspective) more than one dancer's interpretation of a given role and can observe the role performed in various contexts (for example, in productions by different companies).

In his assessment of the differences between these two positions, Sparshott goes as far as to assert that the viewer's experience is also more analytical than the performer's (1985, 104). The present study, however, approaches this matter with caution, reserving judgements

until the concluding chapters. As recently explained by postmodern dance practitioner Steve Paxton, the issue is not that simple. The performer's process may in fact be very similar to, and equally analytical as, the spectator's. Paxton explained a personal example, an investigation whereby the same issues that he identified as a spectator of Cunningham's choreography *Suite for Five* (1956), later persisted for him when he ended up exploring the same work in the role of performer. Even though Cunningham's direction was "Just do the movement," Paxton wondered how "much do you need to empty yourself" to be able to comply with Cunningham's request and do just the movement?<sup>1</sup>

Judging by several published articles written by dancers in the Forsythe company, including texts by Dana Caspersen, 2000, 2007a, 2011 and Nick Haffner, 2003, performers featured in the works in this study have a percipient analytical approach. Whether dancers from different ballet cultures have equally analytical experiences is very difficult to ascertain. Such an approach requires the blending of two distinct viewpoints, a method that is not used in ballet scholarship frequently enough. The structuring of an effective, conjoined methodology draws upon information that is found in one of the two singular points of view, as well as in several existing studies that employ similar methodology that integrate viewpoints of the spectator and the performer.

## 2.1 THE BALLET DANCER'S CONTRIBUTION VIEWED FROM THE SPECTATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

As presented in 1.2, the dancer's individual contribution is challenged by the twentieth-century construct of ballet authorship, where the performer is left with quite limited creative control. Theoretical discussions about the dancer's contribution to the ballet reveal

how the division of roles resulted over time in a quite ambiguous understanding of the performer's work. One illustrative example is found in the 1962 report of the American National Section on Dance where dancers are demoted and described as "re-creative artists" whose contribution cannot constitute "a form of self-expression" (Wooten, 1962, 41). The report, however, also outlines a wide range of expectations from the dancer. During preparations the performers amplify their technical skills and strength, as well as develop the interpretive and stylistic range that is applied in performance. When performing, the dancer is required to express "qualities, rhythms, emotions, lines, designs" and other elements particular to a given choreographic work, but must also integrate all these elements "in such a way that an audience sees and feels" the choreographic message (1962, 41). While this description does paint the complexity of the role, it also frames the performer's contribution as a set of technical abilities that are at the service of choreographic idea and style. The possibility of the dancer's individual contribution is perceived as secondary, at best discretely indicated as the "interpretive" range.

Reflecting upon contemporary Western dance in general, scholar Cynthia Roses-Thema (2008) makes an important point: for a long time analyses of the dancer's contribution to the dance were exclusively made from the viewpoint of the spectator. Roses-Thema warns about the danger of this continuing practice, noting how rarely "any agency [is] attributed to the dancer in action and at best the dancer is theorized as exercising a mindless self-expression" (2008, xi). This point may be recognised in many late-twentieth century discussions about the role of the ballet dancer. Under increasing scrutiny, some disquieting aspects of the ballet performer's role were underscored, particularly in the discourses of cultural theory and feminist and gender studies. The image of "the ballerina" was seen as a

deformed cultural symbol (as in Adair, 1992) and ballet dancers in general were analysed as representatives of conformism, passivity and compliance (even “masochism”, as in Abra, 1988). It is difficult to imagine how a dancer, when viewed in such a weak position, could contribute anything significant to the field.

The dominance of the spectator’s perspective is furthered by dancers themselves, as throughout ballet history the dancer’s voice is rarely heard speaking about the creative process although some excellent exceptions are cited in the first chapter. Therefore, without the input of the most perceptive spectators, such as Denby (who is quoted on p.2 regarding the dancer’s approach), far less would be known today about ballet performance. For example, observe how Denby noted the scope of the dancer’s contribution during the creation of Balanchine’s *Modern Jazz: Variants*. There was a subtle modification in the dancers’ interpretations of the movement that was demonstrated by the choreographer:

Balanchine’s care was for the mechanics of momentum. He did not mention expression. Watching him do a move full force, an outsider might often have been struck by his expression in it – a quality of gesture which was directly to the point. It was beautiful. The dancers did not imitate that. Their expression when it appeared was their own, and he did not criticize it (Denby, 1998/1962, 248).

In this example, the dancer’s contribution is discussed in the context of the choreographer’s process and we therefore do not know what qualities Denby observed as “expression”. Yet it is clear that the change occurred — even in the narrow space for the contribution, the dancer’s interpretation was apparent.

Journalistic sources often provide the important traces of information about the performance of leotard ballets examined in this study. In particular, specialist press publications (including *Ballet Review*, *Ballett Tanz International*, *Dance Now*, *Dancing*



*Times*, *Dance View* and others) publish significant analytical writing and reviewing, as well as interviews with performers who discuss their roles in leotard ballets. Particularly useful for this research were articles by Arlene Croce, Nancy Goldner, Francis Mason and Roslyn Sulcas. Furthermore, spectators with particularly privileged access left important information about the creative process that developed back-stage, in the studios of the two choreographers examined in this thesis. In Balanchine's studio such viewers included Denby, Kirstein, biographers Bernard Taper and Richard Buckle; in Forsythe's case, dramaturges Groves, Heidi Gilpin, Freya Vass-Rhee, and film director Mike Figgis provide vivid images of the studio work. These accounts often offer us a sense of the performer's position in the studio. For instance, Tapper (1984) describes the process behind the creation of *Agon*, and Figgis's documentary *Just Dancing Around?* (1996) captures Forsythe's investigations and gives us a taste of the daily life in Ballett Frankfurt.

Sometimes it was spectators with critical views who drove important theoretical debates about the dancer's role in particular balletic contexts. Ann Daly's influential 1987 analysis of Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments* (although later somewhat revised in Daly, 2000) was very significant in the context of the current research. Daly interrogated the choreography, suggesting that it was detrimental to the female dancer's agency. Balanchine's approach, she argued, turned the ballerina from a subject into a subservient object. However, while critically analysing Balanchine's choreographic style as an example of male autocracy in ballet's arguably deformed gender systems, Daly tangentially made a very important argument in support of the agency of ballet dancers. In praising ballerina Merrill Ashley, who in the plotless ballet *Symphony in C* (1947) broke the system (by

leaving her partner behind), Daly acknowledged the power of the dancer's agency that emerges even in perceivably unlikely conditions (1987, 17).

While several historians and critics directly contested Daly's main hypothesis about Balanchine's choreography (including Banes, 1998, 209-210), Stephanie Jordan and Helen Thomas (1998) took particular note of the argument regarding Ashley's agency. This choreography, Jordan and Thomas argued, had the potential to encourage different performing approaches and should be seen as "a text created in dialogue with its original cast, and that is now a text that has an independent life from that of its creators" (1998, 248). They conclude that the "tripartite structure" of the dance works (choreographer/dance/viewer) must therefore include the fourth factor in the final input – the dancer. This discussion is significant for this study in two ways. Firstly, even if tangentially and unintentionally, Daly's discussion helps to defend the notion of the dancer's agency (in Balanchine) ballet; secondly, Daly's concerns equally underscore the difficulties some viewers may have in recognising the dancer's agency within the spare aesthetics of leotard ballets.

#### 2.1.1 THEORETICAL POSITIONING OF THE PERFORMER'S CONTRIBUTION

The dancer's role was discussed from a theoretical perspective in Hamby (1984). As noted in 1.3, Hamby made the distinction between the dancers' tasks in narrative and plotless dances. While her text does not specifically discuss ballet, Hamby often refers to examples from the genre, as when quoting ballet choreographer Glen Tetley who felt that

the choreographer has to give up control at a certain point, and let the dancer take over the work (1984, 41). Hamby concludes that the dancer has significant control:

No matter what vision a choreographer may have or what imaginative insight a ballet-master may show in reconstructing a work and encouraging, coercing, urging a dancer into a part, in the final analysis the outcome rests on whether the dancer: (a) sees what is necessary for a given part; (b) makes the part his or her own; (c) brings the part 'to life' in the movements of dancing (1984, 41).

While Hamby's important discussion does not elaborate on what these three categories actually mean for the nature of the dancer's contribution, Carr's article on "action" in the art of dance proposes that the performer brings a blend of technical and artistic elements to the dance work (1987). "Skill, meaning and freedom" as related to the Aristotelian concept of *techné* — the craft and skill or "practical wisdom" aspects of art — are combined with the notion *phronesis* or "practical reasoning", thus creating agency (1987, 350; 354).

The agency of the dancer has been theorised recently in detail by Graham McFee who, like Hamby, often refers to ballet examples to illustrate his points (2011, 171-176). McFee contests the notion of the dancer's "artistry", rather proposing that the performer's role should be seen as unique, yet not over-stated. He recognises a certain disjuncture: the dance cannot be seen without the dancer, yet an individual dancer's input cannot be equated with creation (the artist's role), since a dance work may exist in the absence of that particular performer. Instead, the dancer acts as an important agent, whose contribution is two-fold: s/he helps to materialise "the dance into a form with which the rest of us can interact" -- instantiates the dance either "from the score, or from the choreographic instructions". Simultaneously, the performer offers "a version of interpretation" by infusing the dance with a combination of physical properties, technical

expertise and other attributes grouped as “craft mastery”. Regrettably, McFee does not explain his use of the terms “agency” and “craft mastery” much further, but does allow that these aspects may distinguish one performance (token) from another: “There may be occasions” when the craft mastery appears “sufficiently distinctive in respect of a particular dancer as to give a new nuance to the role or part being danced or to generate distinctive performer’s interpretation” (McFee, 2011, 169). While McFee’s contribution to the discourse is more clearly defined than that of many others in the field, perhaps the ambiguous aspects (such as “agency” and “craft mastery”) should be considered in conjunction with Carr’s previously mentioned theory of action (1987), which may help explain more about these qualities.

McFee’s idea that the concept of artistry should be equated with originality (or the role of “creator”) is also debatable. Creativity theorists, including Howard Gardner (1994),<sup>2</sup> Jane Piirto (2004), R. Keith Sawyer (2003 and 2006) and others, discuss the notion of creation and originality in very specific frames. Sawyer’s model, in particular, makes a distinction between creativity and the concept of originality, which he critiques as being a predominantly modern-day Western concept (2006). Chinese classical ink drawings or Quattrocento Italian paintings, for example, show artistry through imitation of earlier models. “All creativity includes elements of tradition and imitation,” argues Sawyer, suggesting that creativity is most often found in the balance of these two aspects (2006, 25-26). In a non-improvisational performance setting, a “creative act” (a type of creation as an end product) occurs if the performer finds a balance between the elements of imitation and innovation, introducing some new qualities into an existing work. Sawyer finds similarities between the input of the performer in a structured work and the

contribution of a literary interpreter, whose creativity emerges through the act of faithfully retaining “the creative spirit of the original” while keeping their own interpretive input minimally apparent (2006, 24).

This discussion of the performer’s “creative contribution” has some resonance with the previously mentioned theoretical text by Hamby (1984), but may also remind us of the complicated classifications of the dancer’s role found in Wooten (1962), discussed in 2.1. It is plausible that the dance performer’s contribution may be found in the modification of the movement layer, which aims to retain the spirit of the original. Its creativity, however, lies in the dancer’s reconciliation of different aspects of their own movement ability with the style of the choreographer, and the work. But, Sawyer also makes distinctions between the creative process and the end product, outcome of creativity (2006, 58-63). As he sees it, the “creative process” refers to several stages in the creation of a product: the training/learning phase, incubation/contemplation, insight/emergence of the idea, and finally its evaluation and reflection. Part of the dancer’s contribution may therefore be in the process of decision-making, yet this aspect might remain separate from what can be obviously observed as a contribution in the final product.

The concept of “agency” is similarly complex, and it is used in our field in different ways. While McFee (2011) uses the term to denote the role of the dancer in general, some theorists use the term to explain that the dancer generates the movement rather than performs the choreography as set by the choreographer. For example, Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg use the term “agent” to explain the position of a dancer in Forsythe’s resident company who has responsibility to “transform” choreographed material, improvise

and generate movement (2002, 31). Dance scholar Jane Carr in a recent presentation “Embodiment & the Puzzle of the Dancer’s Agency” used the term in a narrower sense, to denote the contribution of new dancers who perform Merce Cunningham repertoire, and do not invent movement, but modify aspects of existing material through their interpretations. Another interesting investigation of agency is found in the current recent doctoral research by Bea Prentiss (at Queen’s University Belfast), who investigates the concept as found in the activities of “leading” and “following” in partnered social dances (such as salsa).

Derived from the social theories of action, “agency” refers to an individual’s potential to act and contribute. While this implies a somewhat subjectivist approach, Pierre Bourdieu’s (1992) theory of cultural production positions agency within a complex structure: the network of the subject’s history, culture and its multiple relationships, defined in terms of “field”, “dispositions”, “cultural capital” and “habitus”. The agent’s behaviour within this structure is conditioned by the social dispositions and rules it reflects, and is tied to a set of pre-acquired behaviours and values of which the agent may not be consciously aware. Individuals therefore exercise agency within an existing social field, “a field of possible forces” that “presents itself to each agent as a space of possibilities which is defined in the relationship between the structure of average chances of access to the different positions” (Bourdieu, 1993, 64). Bourdieu’s theory takes into account complex ties between individuals and their setting, not favouring the objectivist, nor subjectivist perspective,<sup>3</sup> and thus it does not dedicate as much time to an individual “agent.” For this thesis thus, his concept of “habitus” and “field” is interesting when understanding the complex networks of influences that make the context from which the dancer approaches the role, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Social theorist Anthony Giddens developed another structural model (1979, 1984) that, for the purpose of this study, positions the concept of individual action more clearly. Giddens defines “agency” as an individual’s ability to act in a situation “where more than one course of action is practically available” (1984, 9;15). Unlike certain other theorists, who firmly tie in the notion of agency with intention or volition,<sup>4</sup> Giddens, argues that (conscious) intention is not a necessary part of agency (1979, 56). Giddens elaborates in his further study that “agency does not refer to people’s intentions but to their ability to act” (1984, 15) and that an agent produces an effect, whether or not aware of the intervention. Like Bourdieu, Giddens includes in his model the notion of practical consciousness or “tacit knowledge that is skilfully applied in the enactment of courses of conduct, but which the actor is not able to formulate discursively” (1984, 57).

The meaning and the possibility of the concept of agency is rarely analysed in reference to ballet performance, although some scholars, including Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg (2002, 31), refer to Forsythe’s dancers as “agents”. Cognitive philosopher Alva Noë investigated the concept of embodied perception, finding that “action” emerges from the activation of the body’s multiple senses, including the experience of touch and weight, without favouring visual aspects of perception (2004). Part of his research, that was explored in collaborations with Forsythe, investigated the dancer’s consciousness in perceptive acts. Although arguably Noë’s study does not engage with Forsythe’s specifically ballet-based investigations, his points could be extended to the choreographer’s work that involved ballet principles.

The contribution of the ballet dancer to the field was previously discussed through the concepts of “the performing style”, drawing on the theoretical work of Adina Armelagos and Mary Sirridge (1984), who discussed the performer’s individual contribution within the particular work (not specific to a dance genre). In their view, a performer’s style may be described as a flexible, dynamic construct that is connected, yet distinct from the overall style of the dance work (that also includes the style of the dance, for example ballet, as well as the style of the choreographer).<sup>5</sup> While interesting, and influential in the field, this theory had some limitations, as identified by several dance scholars.

Susan Leigh Foster, for example, found that the concept of performing style as proposed by Armelagos and Sirridge cannot be viewed as a set of collective, general attributes that define all performances by an individual dancer (1986, 77). Instead, the dancer’s contribution in some cases may be specific to a particular role (or dance work), manifesting itself as a performing “quality”. This quality, Foster proposed, can be seen as a “texture, or *effort* [in Laban’s terms] found in movement as it is performed” (1986, 77). This quality may be role-specific and thus diverge from the dancer’s overall performing signature. Such qualities may be observed when two dancers’ “executions of the same choreography” are compared. Foster, who explores various styles of dance, and not just ballet, illustrates her point by analysing two performances of Odette’s role in Petipa’s *Swan Lake*.<sup>6</sup> Foster however limits her discussion too. While the idea that the dancer’s contribution may be described simply as a quality or a set of *efforts*, she does not address whether this role-specific style involves modulations or instead remains constant in the given role, throughout the performer’s career.



Dance scholar Sarah Whatley (2006) further identifies limitations of the concept identified by Armelagos and Sirridge. Whatley argues that the relationships between different styles (choreographer's and the performer's for example) are very complex. Through her analysis of the dancers' performances in Siobhan Davies's choreography, Whatley reminds us that the dancer's personal style is not always "an articulation and further development of general style". It is difficult to judge how much "the dancers themselves influence or create performance style," as the dancer's personal style may develop "alongside but in sympathy with the choreographer's general style" (2006, 119). A careful analysis of different dancers' performances in Davies's repertoire leads Whatley toward more complex findings. She wonders, "[D]o the dancers embody style or is style embodied in the dancers?" (Whatley, 2006, 126)

Although not entirely independent of choreographic style, performance style can refer to an identifiable style of presentation, created by an individual performer or collectively by the performers in one work or a body of work (Whatley, 2006, 126)

There is a great "interconnectedness" of the network of styles "in which choreographer, dancer, tradition and convention are woven together" (Whatley, 2006, 126).

This great complexity of the performer's style in the context of ballet performance is explored by Morris (2000) in the context of Ashton's work. Morris proposes that we should think about the "network of styles" to perceive the interdependence between the style of the performer and the choreographer. Using movement analysis to reveal significant ties between the styles of the performer and the choreographer, Morris found that these styles are distinct, yet profoundly linked. Furthermore, as Morris finds, the ballet dancer's style is not "wholly personal" but rather partly shaped by the performer's

“technical training” (2000, 210). Since the performer’s personal style does not explain the full range of the dancer’s contribution in Ashton’s work, Morris also uses the concept of interpretation, which “involves making considered choices”, as some features of Ashton’s choreography were open to the performer’s decision-making (2000, 274-275). Such features included the dynamics of movement, musical phrasing and the facial expressions were some aspects of dance movement where Ashton allowed an “admissible range” of interpretation. Both Morris’s and Whatley’s ideas are significant for this thesis as they demonstrate the importance of viewing the dancer’s contribution as a complex set of attributes (for example, style and interpretation) that may be specific to one choreographer’s style of work.

While there is a complex body of theories of interpretation, it is interesting to note that, unlike with theories of “agency”, they more often refer to intentional readings of the text or event. Proposals that see the dancer’s contribution as a type of “reading” of text all in some measure relate to Barthes’s influential 1968 theory of fluid authorship. Barthes questions author-centric analyses (1978/1968, 143), allowing the reader to be recognised as an agent of interpretation. In dance, Ann Cooper Albright proposed that two levels of reading exist in dance – the performer’s reading of the choreographer’s idea, and the viewer’s reading of the interpretation by the dancer (Albright, 1997, 186). Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg also note this complexity, focusing on the similarities in the nature of the two readings. For the viewer, as for the performer, the act of interpreting [a work] involves a similar, if not identical, network of influences — the “construction of meanings” from an individual perspective, which is an opinion in amalgamation with the

person's "own memory, experience, knowledge, expectations and culture" (Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg, 2002, 17).

The theoretical debate between Robert Stecker (1997 and 2003) and Paul Thom (2003) outside of the field of dance develops this notion further. Both theorists consider two levels of reading, but disagree about their scope. Stecker emphasises a binary distinction, arguing that interpretation that is "confined to critical interpretation of the artwork," leaves aside "interpretations that are given in performance of artworks" (1997, 93). Thom aims to blend the division, suggesting that the two are not necessarily so different. A common element to any interpretative activity (Thom discusses musical performance) is "relative to the material that is being interpreted" (2003, 126). Therefore, similarly to the spectator/critic, the performer also inevitably reads the work in diverse ways, even while faithfully performing it within its normative framework (the "text").

Thom cautions, however, that although every work offers a "possibility of interpretation" only some performances constitute "critical interpretations" (2003, 126-127). Additional "conditions of projection and integration have to be met" and the principal condition is related to the actualisation of this interpretation in the performance. The contribution has to be perceivable, "projected by performers as part of their performance, rather than being merely in the ... minds of the performers" (2003, 127). Thus, Thom (similarly to Armelagos and Sirridge, 1984 Foster 1986, and Sawyer 2006) re-emphasises the importance of the relationship between the performer and the end-product (the dance performance). The link between the contribution and the outcome of the performance is also emphasised in several recent theories of agency. For example, music theorist Ingrid

Monson draws upon Giddens's idea of agency as the capacity to act, and discusses the notion of "perceptual agency" embedded in the performance as a product and not as an idea or cognitive intent (2008, 37).

The research in the case studies presented in the thesis is informed by all the theoretical models (agency, creativity, style, interpretation) discussed in this section. All offer useful perspectives for the analysis of the dancer's contribution. The nature of the dancer's contribution in leotard ballets by Balanchine and Forsythe is not yet hypothesised at this point, but will be revisited after the analysis of the performances is carried out.

## 2.2 HISTORICAL SOURCES FROM THE PERFORMER'S PERSPECTIVE

In comparison with the spectator's perspective, material that reveals the practitioners' viewpoint is not so abundant. It may be, as Morris found from personal experience, that it is difficult for dancers to reflect on their own embodied experiences. As Morris said, since specific movement affinities "became my accustomed way of moving at the time, I was not always aware of the nuances and characteristics of the style, such as dynamics and spatial elements" (2000, 68). Although the dancers may not often speak about their embodied processes, it is nevertheless significant to consider the studies that are available, allowing us insight into the performers' thinking of their own work and contribution.

As explained in the previous section, research regarding the performer's perspective seldom comes directly from the ballet dancers. From the middle of the last century, dance research that aimed to bring to light the performer's inner process emerged in the field of

dance phenomenology, often drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's 1962/1945 *Phenomenology of Perception* and the concept of "embodiment". Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's *The Phenomenology of Dance* (1966), Judith Lynne Hanna's *To Dance is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication* (1979), and Sondra Horton Fraleigh's *Dance and Lived Body* (1996) are core texts that pioneered first-person narrative as a dance research methodology. However, with an aim to focus on the performer's experience, phenomenology most often centred upon internal, highly individualistic processes. Like most studies based on the spectator's perspective, these analyses thus offered one-sided views, without clearly addressing the connections between the process and the performance as its outcome.

The more recent fields of practice-based research have opened up new, wide-ranging methodological perspectives.<sup>7</sup> Of particular interest to the current study is the doctoral thesis of contemporary dancer Jennifer Roche (2009) at University of Roehampton, who drew on phenomenology but also constructed a complex analytical approach, repositioning herself as the researcher and analyst of her own creative process and performance (Roche, 2009, 141). Roche theorised her own position as "narrator" of own experience and as the "material" through which different choreographic texts are realised. Her thesis formulated the concept of the independent dancer's "moving identity", which emerges through the embodiment of various "choreographic signatures" (2009, 141). Roche found that as the dancer moves through various choreographic styles and performance environments, the individual manner of moving becomes "destabilised" but a core "signature movement identity" simultaneously becomes established (2009, 144). During the investigation Roche recognised that the dancer's signature identity is partially conditioned by training and habitus. Although she researches the dancer outside ballet, Roche's findings about the

“moving identity” are useful for the potential similarity with dancers in international repertory ballet companies, where the performers also transition between various choreographic and movement styles.

Research from the dancer’s perspective in relation to ballet is still rare. While Farrell’s biographical accounts show a reflective analytical attitude, more similarities to practice-led research about ballet contexts is found in the writings of Caspersen (2000, 2007 and 2011) who analyses the embodied concepts explored in the Forsythe choreography. Caspersen discusses her individual responses within both more and less structured exploratory tasks, thus revealing the dancer’s internal movement exploration, sometimes directly referring to balletic concepts (such as *épaulement*). Several other dancers who worked with Forsythe have also reflected on their processes in writing. These include documents left by Ana Catalina Roman in the LABAN archive (Preston-Dunlop, 2009), which help explain the types of exploration carried out by dancers within the company culture of Ballett Frankfurt.

The accounts of ballet dancers in general are more usually found as anecdotal recollections published in auto/biographies and journalistic interviews. Several Balanchine dancers have recorded their recollections in some of these formats. These documents include autobiographies by Allegra Kent (1998), Barbara Milberg-Fisher (2006), Edward Villella (1998), and the biography of Violette Verdy (Huckenpahler, 1978). Kirkland’s and Farrell’s previously mentioned autobiographical reports are particularly rich in self-analysis of the creative process (as the citations in 1.3 indicate). Several interview collections with dancers (including Gruen 1975, Mason 1992, Newman 1982 and 2004, and Tracy 1983) add important additional testimonies about Balanchine’s leotard ballets, viewed from the

dancer's perspective. In Forsythe's opus, in addition to aforementioned writings by Caspersen, Haffner and Catalina-Roman, the collection of visual documents by dancer Agnes Noltenius (2003) is of interest, as are conversations of Caspersen and Forsythe with choreographer Jonathan Burrows (Burrows, 1998) and scholar Steven Spier (Spier, 2007). Important accounts by dancers from international repertory companies embodying Forsythe's choreography are discussed in articles by Sulcas. For example, see the ideas of dancers from the American Ballet Theatre, working with Jill Johnson on the staging of the Forsythe ballet *workwithinwork* in Sulcas, 2004.

In addition to these print sources, several archival oral and videotaped recordings (capturing interviews, public lectures and demonstrations) also provide an insight into the ballet dancers' thoughts about their own agency in reference to the repertoire under study here (Marshall and Bull, 1998, for example). Oral history recordings (for example, Garafola, 1996) currently available in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of New York Public Library and several recently published commercial DVD recordings of ballet performances (for example, Belle, 1995) record dancers' thoughts about their creative process in practice-clothes ballets. *The Interpreters Archive* project of the George Balanchine Foundation as an ongoing documentation of the coaching process is a significant collection that documents the approach of different dancers. New digital sources of relevance include the repository of dancers' recollections *In the Balanchine Classroom* (Hochman and Hochman, 2011), offering over eighty short filmed interviews with former Balanchine dancers of different generations.

This research was nonetheless carried out with an awareness of the limitations of using the sources from the performer's perspective. Similarly to the discussion of the spectator's perspective, much documentation of the first-hand experiences of the performer focuses on the discussion of process. In the words of Hamby if the dancer "fails to make the dance design visible, no amount of visual acuity on the part of spectators can make up for this, the design is just not there to be seen!" (1984, 42) With many of the sources listed above (with the exceptions of Roche's study, or *The Interpreters Archive* which records the dancer's work on film) there is no real possibility to assess the relationship between the experience of the dancer and the actual performance.

### 2.3 INTEGRATED APPROACHES IN THE CURRENT DANCE SCHOLARSHIP

In his explorations of human consciousness, cognitive philosopher Daniel Dennett (1991, and updated in 2003 and 2007 articles) warned about the limitations and subjectiveness of phenomenology's first-person perspective, proposing instead a "heterophenomenological" approach, or a third-person perspective in approaching phenomenological experiences. Dennett argues that a heterophenomenologist — an outside observer, who honours contrasts between their own perspective and that of the insider — may better "preserve and protect the point of view of the subject" yet open the "first-person methods" to the external, more "objective" research (2007, 7). To this effect, Dennett relies on combining first-person narrative reports with a range of scientific experiments and also ethnographic and anthropological tools. In this case, the researcher still learns about and from the subject's experiences in "a cautious, controlled way" and without granting them something



similar to “papal infallibility” (1991, 111). Although not subscribing to the heterophenomenological model, which has a specific purpose as well as limitations,<sup>8</sup> Dennett’s idea of a “bridge” between the insider’s input and the outsider’s view was of interest when conducting this research.

A blended approach was not often used in dance studies until quite recently. One of the earliest studies to juxtapose several perspectives, including the dancer’s, was Katherine Teck’s (1989) collection of observations about the collaborative processes that occur in Western contemporary dance performance. Similarly, certain ethnographic research (such as the one-year study of New York City Ballet culture conducted by Joseph Mazo, 1974, or the investigation of Forsythe choreography across several ballet companies by Helena Wulff, 1998a and 1998b)<sup>9</sup> presented the experiences of the both viewer and the performer. Wulff’s investigation of the influence of backstage events over stage performances of Forsythe’s ballets is particularly interesting for this study.<sup>10</sup> Wulff demonstrated the importance of the dancer’s culture as one of the core influences over the performer’s ability to adapt to various choreographic styles. The framework of her comprehensive study, however, allowed only for a panoramic view of particular ballets, as she was focused on the role of different agents in the process, including the companies’ artistic staff and leadership, administration, but also other back-stage figures, such as technicians. The experiences of various performers and their interpretations of the particular plotless ballets were painted with broad strokes.

One interesting investigation that blends the perspectives of the spectator and dancer is Roses-Thema’s (2008) previously mentioned study of the “dancer as a rhetor” of own performance. A former dancer, Roses-Thema conducted her study solely from the

perspective of theorist and observer,<sup>11</sup> combining methods from phenomenology, somatic studies and ethnographic fieldwork (observing the dancers and interviewing them immediately after the performance). As she was interested in the dancer's phenomenological experience during each individual performance, Roses-Thema worked with a small group of performers, observing their experiences in the same choreography over several evenings. In some ways related to the heterophenomenological approach, this method offered a detailed insight into the performer's experience of a single performance and showed that interviewing promptly after the event is an effective way to record the dancer's inside process from the outside. Roses-Thema's study also revealed the importance of various external and internal stimuli that affect the dancer, including the influence of audience, pain/injuries, or circumstances of the daily personal life. Roses-Thema's research did not, however, observe whether the performer's phenomenal experiences translate into visible effects in performance.

An elaborate blended methodology regarding the dancer's process and performance is found in recent studies by cognitive scientist David Kirsh (2009, 2010 and 2011), who empirically studies the work of choreographer Wayne McGregor and his dancers.<sup>12</sup> Although this research relates to McGregor's work in the contemporary idiom (in the Random Dance company) rather than directly addressing choreography in the ballet setting, Kirsh's research findings are important for this study, in particular his conclusions about the dancer's use of body as a cognitive medium (2010, 1). Examining how dance practitioners "use their bodies to think" Kirsh explores the dancers' process in the studio, during the creation of a new choreographic work (2011, online). He investigates how the choreographer's process facilitates the dancers' ability to "break their personal [movement]

signatures” by employing complex field methodology (live filming, quantitative measurements, subsequent analytical analysis of the film recordings and qualitative interviews of the choreographer and dancers). Kirsh finds that dancers sustain periods of short- and long-term creativity during the studio process, and that many times they “don’t think in words” but perceive and process changes through their physical actions: they “think” in “visual, tactile or somato-sensory forms” (Kirsh 2011, online). The dancer has the “capacity to relate somatic or kinesthetic [sic] images to motor dispositions,” which they can then use to “judge” the aesthetic quality of the movement as they perform it.

By interpreting their movement through the lens of one or more sensory modalities other than movement control per se, they [the dancers] are able to judge whether the movement looks right visually, feels right somatically and kinesthetically, or whether it captures a sound right (Kirsh, 2011, online).

For this research, the interest is foremostly in Kirsh’s finding that an individual process of “creative cognition” allows the dancer not only to create new movement, but also to evaluate it somatically (almost) simultaneously. This may remind us of Farrell’s speculation (cited on pp. 2-3) about the change in the look of her movements after her modifications in response to the music. Another very interesting finding for the current research is that the “thinking processes” of many of the dancers in Kirsh’s study (although directed to use structural images by the choreographer) involved the invention of their own “representational” images (perhaps in a way similar to that discussed in the Kirkland example on 1.3). This process was not however identical for all dancers: “for a given person it might be easier to run imagery” and thus employ their own visual system, while other people may not think in terms of images (Kirsh, 2011, online).

Outside of cognitive studies, a combination of ethnographic observation and movement analysis was used by Whatley in her aforementioned research of Siobhan Davies's choreography. In her doctoral research Whatley (2002) examined movement vocabulary and investigated the role of dancers from different company cultures, seeing them as contributors, the "makers of meaning". Similarly to Foster's comparison of the dancers' movement qualities, Whatley demonstrated the usefulness of Laban's methods as analytical tools. In ballet studies, a combined methodology that included the view of the performer is found in Morris's (2000) research on Ashton's style (discussed in 2.1). Morris approached her study as a former professional dancer, with first-hand embodied knowledge of the movement style and of Ashton's working methods, yet (similarly to Roses-Thema, 2008) was clear that her research was conducted from the perspective of an analyst who was not directly involved as the subject of the study.

Stephanie Jordan's in-depth investigations of choreography and its relationship with music, including Balanchine's work, is also very relevant to this study (in particular, Jordan 1994, 2000, 2002, 2007). Jordan developed structural analyses of several of Balanchine's works and in the process drew out strong conclusions about the dancer's influence over the look of the choreographic text (see Jordan 2000 and 2002). The methodologically complex approach used in these studies is based on the examination of filmed records, the juxtaposition of musical notation and Labanotation, the interviewing of various participants (conductors, répétiteurs and dancers), as well as the review of textual, historical sources. Jordan's work is used particularly in connection with the Balanchine case study.

Finally, ballet education research by Paula Salosaari (2002 and 2010), who investigated the concept of the “multiple embodiment” of the ballet dancer was significant for the current study. Salosaari’s research is in some aspects similar to Roche’s investigation (her idea of “multiple embodiment” resonates with Roche’s “moving identity”). While phenomenological in approach, similarly to Roche, Salosaari’s method is practice-led and builds methodology that investigates cognitive and embodied aspects of movement. Unlike Roche, Salosaari conducted the research in her role as a teacher (from a third-person perspective), examining ballet exercises as avenues for opening out creative responses in dancers. Similarly to McGregor/Kirsh, Salosaari used structural imagery in order to encourage the dancers to modify their movement qualities in the execution of basic codified ballet steps. Similarly to Kirsh, Salosaari found that imagery highly influences the dancers: when the awareness of imagery is elevated, the qualitative contribution visibly emerges. Instead of repeating habitual somatic patterns, the dancer then approaches familiar movement in an “open-ended way”, and thus responds as a “creative” agent rather than a replicator of steps (Salosaari, 2002, 219-220).

## 2.4 BLENDING THE BINARIES: THE THESIS METHODOLOGY

With research questions from the initial chapter in mind, as well as with the information from the various documents and theoretical views presented in sections 2.1-2.3, the construction of this study’s methodology was carefully considered. The aim was to devise a method that builds a bridge between the perspectives of viewer and dancer, where the dancer is a subject but also a contributor and a commentator of own performance. The methodological approach in this research, therefore, is multi-layered:

- The four works examined in the study are situated within the tradition of the leotard ballet sub-genre (1.4). They are considered through Altman's (2008) concept of narrative, and within the theoretical context of Osborne's mode of abstraction and other current aesthetic discourses on the communicational possibilities of plotless artworks, as discussed in 1.1.
- The study recognises the importance of contextual influences, such as the dancer's ballet/company culture and various aspects of training. As explained in Chapter 3, these combined underlying influences are theorised with reference to Bourdieu's (1990/1980) concept of habitus.
- While the study recognises that the ballet performer functions within certain structures, the dancers in this study are approached as individuals. The judgements about the overall contribution (including agency, interpretation, performing style, 2.1) that different dancers from various company cultures and provenances bring to their roles are not pre-emptively hypothesised, but are instead reserved until after the analysis has been carried out.
- The thesis focuses on several examples of solo roles from four ballets (two by each choreographer, as shown on fig. 1.0 below). The examples are presented in two separate case studies (Balanchine, Chapter 4 and Forsythe, Chapter 5), where detailed movement analysis is intended as a presentation of the pieces of a mosaic. In this sense, the complete picture of the dancer's contribution in leotard ballets fully emerges when the data from the two case studies is juxtaposed in Chapter 6. The movement analysis

of solo examples is carried out from a third-person (the author's) perspective, investigating available historical records of performance including films, video and digital recordings and, where available, live performances (2.7).

CASE STUDIES	BALLETS/ROLES	COMPANIES
George Balanchine	1. <i>The Four Temperaments</i> (1951 version): "Melancholic" and "Sanguinic"	New York City Ballet, The Royal Ballet, The National Ballet of Canada
	2. <i>Agon</i> (1957): "Bransle Gay"	New York City Ballet, The Royal Ballet
William Forsythe	1. <i>the second detail</i> (1991): "Nora," "Tracy"	Ballett Frankfurt, The National Ballet of Canada
	2. <i>Steptext</i> (1985): "Female solo"	The Royal Ballet

Fig. 1.0 Ballets analysed in the study

- The differences between the dancers' renditions of the same choreography are compared through movement analysis, by looking at the dancer use of Laban's concepts of *effort*, *shape* (*Eukinetics*) and *kinsephere* (*Choreutics*). *Motif writing* is also used during the analytical process (2.6).
- The information obtained through the movement analysis of performance records is integrated with the ethnographic notes (from "participant observation" conducted mainly in the National Ballet of Canada and Canada's National Ballet School) and qualitative interviews with the dancers. The interviews were conducted with selected dancers whose filmed (and/or live) performances are analysed in the case studies.

Additional fieldwork information was gained through partial participation (Spradley, 1980).

The framework outlined above inevitably requires an interweaving of historical and ethnographic methods. On one hand, the viewer's perspective necessitates reliance upon historical sources (analyses of written and filmed records) as well as ethnographic research (observation of the dancer's working process). The dancer's perspective also blends both historical sources (reviews of anecdotal and analytical documents left by the dancers across time, 2.2) and participation in interviews (2.8).

As dance scholar Theresa Buckland explains, blending of historical and ethnographic methods is now an established approach in dance studies. Although these two methodological approaches (historical and ethnographic) are distinct, the division between them is less sharp in the current practices than in past styles of research. Buckland explains that she favours integrated methods because they allow a greater flexibility, accommodating the way in which the researcher relates "to people and their practices" as a result of a personal history and cultural perspective (2006, viii).

In my own research, I relate to the dancers from the perspective of a dance analyst and visual art practitioner and historian. My analytical background includes core training in Laban's movement analysis and Bartenieff Fundamentals,<sup>13</sup> as well as an extensive five-year visual analysis and aesthetics education in a combined practical and theoretical BA degree from the University of Fine Arts Belgrade, Serbia. The earlier professional experiences both within and outside academia, including a ten-year dance reviewing



background, provided useful additional training for implementing the present methodology. My background also includes the experience of being a ballet student in several dance schools in Toronto, Canada, including nine years of regular adult ballet training in Canada's National Ballet School, whose methods and culture are directly relevant for this study.<sup>14</sup> It is a hope that this trans-disciplinary and cross-cultural background allows me to effectively assume the role of dance analyst and partial participant-ethnographer in the field research, interacting with dancers across several ballet cultures.

## 2.5 BUILDING THE CASE STUDIES

The dances selected for this study are four well-known and widely performed ballets (fig. 1.0, see p.61). All the selected solo examples feature a lead dancer in a fairly similar setting, performing an independent variation, but with other dancers framing the action or participating indirectly on stage. (One exception is the female role in duet, "Sanguinic".) The solo roles are observed in the context of the whole work, and the discussions sometimes refer to the other parts of the ballet and to other dancers present, on stage or off.

The selection of dancers was based on the availability of film documentation, as well as on opportunities to interview the performer. Since the objective was to understand how various dancers see and perform the same leotard ballet role, it was important to have different company cultures represented (including the resident companies, Ballett Frankfurt and New York City Ballet, and repertory companies such as the National Ballet of Canada and the Royal Ballet). The international companies, however, do not perform an

identical range of both choreographers' works (Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments* is the only work currently on the repertory of both companies). *Steptext* was performed by the Canadian company, but there are no recordings available; the ballet is not performed by Ballett Frankfurt, but the majority of the movement material is performed within the second act of 1984 *Artifact*. This is why sometimes additional material is used. For example, since the Royal Ballet does not perform Forsythe's *the second detail*, the dancers from two other international troupes — the Norwegian National Ballet and Dresden Semper Oper Ballett — are analysed in this example (as will be fully clarified in Chapter 5). All these adaptations are measured and contemplated with the principal aim that the dissertation should provide a range of leotard ballet roles, as well as dancers performing them, and that the contextual differences are clearly presented and carefully considered.

## 2.6 ANALYSING THE DANCER'S PERFORMANCE: LABAN'S METHODS

As Farrell (p.2) speculated, her performing approach in ballet *Chaconne* that was modified in the midst of the performance, certainly may have affected her dance. Laban analyst Suzanne Youngerman explains that with the variations in the movement motivation “there will be differences in how the movement looks” (1984, 116). While these nuances may be subtle, they are often marked as differences between the styles (and, as Foster noted, between performances, as discussed on p.45). As suggested by several other scholars (such as Foster, Morris and Whatley), Laban's theoretical framework provides effective conceptual tools to analyse nuances in dancers' interpretations. In the field of dance studies it is also recognised that Laban's system also has some limitations for example, it is frequently seen as slanted towards the Western affinity for spatial design and shape, while

insufficient attention is given to the socio-cultural context.<sup>15</sup> Even so, several dance anthropologists, including Deidre Sklar, accept that Laban's theory is one of the most suitable systems for detailed descriptions of movement at the present time (2006, 103). This thesis, which engages with a Western dance form (leotard ballet) and examines the intrinsic qualities of movement, uses Laban's theory as a pertinent investigative system with a useful vocabulary.

As a dance theorist, choreographer and practitioner, Rudolf Laban (1879 – 1958) proposed complex theoretical and practical frameworks for addressing the various qualitative properties of bodily actions. His method is composed of co-related, yet independent, sub-systems for analysing and recording dance: *Labanotation* (the movement notation system), *Choreutics* (the study of spatial relationships) and *Eukinetics* (the study of the movement dynamics, sometimes known as the *Effort/Shape* theory), as explained in McCaw (2011, 197). Youngerman summarises the method, pointing out that one of the main common threads of all these sub-systems is that they speak about the process of moving, rather than about resulting movement positions (1984, 109-112).

While all parts of the system are inter-connected (for example, according to Maletic, 1987, 97, Laban conceptualised *Eukinetics* as a part of the *Choreutic* <sup>16</sup> study), they also had different evolutionary trajectories. Some concepts were refined by Laban's students much later than their original formulations were created. This is why all the systems are seldom used in conjunction within a single research (Youngerman, 1984, 116). It is more common to use specific parts of the system; for example, Morris (2000) found the "choreutic unit"

useful in the analysis of the dancer's performing style, while Foster (1986) used the *Eukinetic* concept of *effort*.

In the analysis and descriptions of the dancer's individual movement qualities in leotard ballets that are often evident as the differences in the nuances of movement, this thesis will utilise predominantly *Eukinetic* concepts of *effort* (explaining motion factors as the qualities through which movement is interpreted), *shape* (relationships between body parts) and the *Choreutic* principle of *kinesphere* (which explains how the dancer uses personal space). While notation is not a major point of focus in this analysis (*Labanotation* is not used), the basic successions of steps and movement phrases are studied through the method of *Motif writing*. These selected parts of Laban's analytical method (the *Choreutic* principle *kinesphere*, the *Motion Factors* of the *effort* system, as well as *shape flow*) are correlated and can be seen in conjunction or apart, thus providing ample resources for assessing the nuances of the dancer's individual execution of the same choreographic phrase, or overall leotard role.

#### 2.6.1 MOTIF WRITING

*Motif writing* is described as a "basic tool to document central aspects of the movement process" (Laban-Eurolab, 2011, online). For this thesis, *Motif* notation was most important during the process of research (for example, while analysing the dancer's movement on film) as it enabled a quicker process of graphic annotation (the *effort* motion factors can be integrated clearly and easily, see Preston-Dunlop, 1967c). For the purpose of this research, I refer to the original basic system (published in Preston-Dunlop, 1967a-d). This system

contains efficient and adequate tools for the current analysis (the updated and expanded version by Ann Hutchinson Guest, 2007, was found to be more complex than this study required).<sup>17</sup> While in the body of the text (in Chapters 4 and 5) the *effort* graphs are often presented to illustrate textual analysis of movement qualities, *Motif* charts are only seldom shown, as they refer to the basic steps of the choreography which are common to all dancers' performances in the same role.

### 2.6.2 EFFORT AND SHAPE

*Eukinetics* is described as the part of the Laban system “in which the dynamic structure of movement can be determined” (Maletic, 1987, 97). Laban’s complex concept of *effort*, as explained by Youngermann (1984, 107),<sup>18</sup> signifies the “how” or adverbial dimensions of movement. Laban devises a clear structure of four basic “motion factors”, where each has a range of modulations. Davies carefully lays out the complexity of the three principal motion factors identified by Laban — *space*, *force* and *time* — explaining their internal “contrasting polarities between which they vary” (2006, 43). For example, the factor of *space* is described as the total area of the *kinesphere* — the personal space in which one moves, and thus the *effort*, describes the quality of the movement that one uses to act in this space. Therefore, the *space effort* can be *indirect/flexible* (as in meandering, being disoriented), or pointed and *direct* (moving in a purposeful or concentrated manner).

*Force*, sometimes known as “weight” as the second motion factor, can be understood as a “type of pressure put into action” (in Davies, 2006, 43). (When the term “*weight*” is used in the context of *effort*, this aspect does not necessarily refer to the pull of the gravity, but

rather to the attitude toward the use of body weight — for example, “increasing or decreasing pressure”, as explained by Nyqvist, 2011.) *Force*, or “*weight*” is thus either reflective of “diminishing pressure” (moving with lightness, delicacy), or “increasing, assertive pressure” (for example, as in a hug), as elaborated by Davies (2006, 43). *Time* relates to the “pace”, which can be either speedy (urgent, *quick*, *sudden*), or slow (*sustained*, held, or just with a leisurely approach) (Davies, 2006, 43).

These three principal values on the *effort* diagram (fig. 1.1) can be seen, as Preston-Dunlop puts it, as the primary colours within the palette that makes up movement content (1998, 36). Their possible combinations may be limitless, as the movements may be sequenced gradually (as in deceleration/acceleration) or abruptly, and thus the shading can involve various contrapuntal or harmonious qualities.

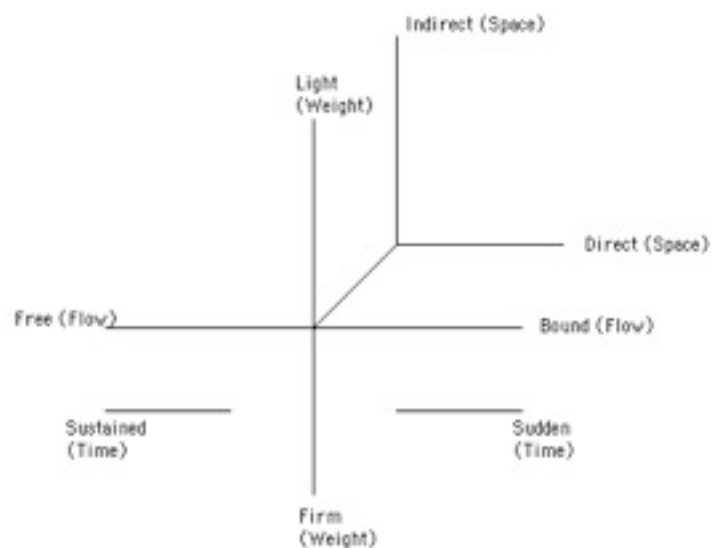


Fig. 1.1 Laban *Effort* Graph

(Image: Coast Community College District, David W. Megill, and Donald D. Megill, 2005)

The *motion factors* (*space, force and time*) in various combinations create *effort actions*. (For example, a movement can be described as *light, sustained* and *indirect*, and this *effort action* is known as *floating*.) As Youngerman argues, with these possibilities Laban's *effort* terminology is clearer than alternative linguistic descriptions filled with adjectives (1984, 107). (For example, the word "graceful" tells us very little: it may refer to the elongation of *kinesphere*, or perhaps involve a combination of light and sustained *efforts*, or it perhaps describes a mixture of *indirect* and *sustained* qualities.)

The addition of the fourth *motion factor* — the horizontal bar across the centre, the *flow* — greatly multiplies the possibilities in this already overwhelming complexity. *Flow* was first identified by Laban, but it was further defined by Lamb. As McCaw explains, each of the movement actions can be performed either with a feeling of abandonment (or *free flow*), or indeed be controlled and restrained (or *bound flow*) (2011, 199). Davies describes the difference in the *flow* as, for example, movement sensations of allowing oneself "to be blown along by the wind" (so that the legs "go faster and faster", resulting in *free flow*) and, in contrast, resisting the wind (and thus "controlling" the running, the *bound flow*) (2006, 48). *Flow* is not only subject to *effort*, but also to the concept of *shape*, which stands for the ways in which the body adapts to space. As discussed in Davies, the *Shape* introduces directions and "planes" of movement such as vertical — rising/sinking, horizontal — spreading/enclosing and sagittal — advancing/retreating (2006, 40-42).

Developed later than *effort* (and like *flow*, refined by Lamb), *shape* "refers to the architectural qualities of movement, its structure, whilst *effort* is the content of the movement..." (Davies, 2006, 40). The *shape*, Davies explains, can have its own range of

*flow* (and this is notated separately from the *effort* graph). The *shape flow* may thus fluctuate between *growing* and *shrinking*, which signifies variations of the “physical reach” (Davies, 2006, 41). While *shape* is another very complex category, for this study the concept of *shape flow* (which is not related to the flow in the *effort* motion factors) is most interesting. *Shape flow* explains the ways in which body parts may relate to one another and to the whole space of the *kinesphere* as well as postural/gestural movement accentuation. In a way, *shape flow* thus connects the concepts of *effort* with that of the *kinesphere*, and as such it is very useful for the analysis in this research.

### 2.6.3 CHOREUTICS AND KINESPHERE

The concept of *kinesphere* comes from the system of *Choreutics* and was investigated in detail by Preston-Dunlop throughout her career. While Preston-Dunlop develops a wide application of the system, for this analysis the concept of *kinesphere* as a personal space “within the reach of the body” (Preston-Dunlop, 1995, 612) is particularly relevant.<sup>19</sup> As a kind of “personal bubble” around the dancer’s body, the *kinesphere* correlates with the mover’s own body size, but also with the extension of movement into space. As an example of how this concept may relate to the dancer’s performance, Preston-Dunlop gives the example of a simple ballet port-de-bras: there is no reason why an individual dancer may not “disperse” the codified movement with a slight modification in a *kinesphere*, expanding the reach or introducing a subtle change in the curved trajectory (1983, 80). McCaw explains the relationship between the *kinesphere* and the *effort/shape*: regardless of the size of *kinesphere*, every movement consists of the four motion factors (2011, 199).

Some people like to vary its [the *kinesphere*’s] size between big, even beyond their physical reach, down to a small shrunk *kinesphere*. Others will operate more



in one than the other with very little variation. It is very easy to imagine the difference in impact between a person who operates on the *growing* side of the continuum to the person on the *shrinking* side, and it has nothing to do with their physical size (Davies, 2006, 41 [*italics added*]).

As Maletic explains, the “extension and size of movement” may refer to “vertical and bilateral extensions, and relate to the “sphere of the movement — kinesphere — which can grow and shrink by means of stretching and bending the joints” (1987, 177). The variations in *kinesphere* may be numerous. As Konie (2011) summarises, three core principles may be observed in the person’s approach to *kinesphere*:

- central, where movement radiates out from, and comes back to the centre
- peripheral, “revealing the edge by maintaining a distance” from the centre
- transverse: movement which “cuts or sweeps through the space” mainly the space between the centre and the edge of *kinesphere* (Konie, 2011, online).

For the purposes of this study, Forsythe’s exploration of Laban’s idea of movement as the principle of “living architecture” is of particular importance for understanding the implementation of *Choreutic principles* in ballet choreography. During the key period investigated in this study, Forsythe’s investigations often drew on the framework of *Choreutics* (for example, the principle of “tubing” or translating a dance phrase by using an extremely narrow and long *kinesphere*, as in the first, 1987, version of [*The*]<sup>20</sup> *Loss of Small Detail*, explained in Preston-Dunlop, 2009). Often times Forsythe emphasises the performance of codified ballet movements through off-balance actions<sup>21</sup>, or by emphasising transverse and peripheral *kinesphere*. Many of Forsythe’s improvisational

methods and tasks as seen in his digital dance training tool *Improvisation Technologies* (Forsythe, 2000) relate to such *Choreutic* principles.

## 2.7 DANCE ANALYSIS AND FILMED PERFORMANCE RECORDS

As several existing studies show, analysis of the dancer's filmed movement is an indispensable method. Although they have particular limitations, filmed records for example can be re-viewed many times. As dance historian Penelope Reed Doob explained, it may take "several performances before we can begin to know a work in any detail, and the attempt to distinguish one dancer's performance from another's demands fifth and sixth visits to the theatre" (1975, 15). Morris found that even when the film quality is poor, it is still a very useful tool when investigating the performer's approach (2000, 61). She found that dancers' interviews were also "more revealing when used in conjunction" with the analysis of films (2000, 61). An additional value of filmed performance records is their verifiability, and the possibility that other viewers and researchers may access and review the same material.

However, when dealing with filmed records it is necessary to keep in mind that these documentations are not replicas of actual performances. As performance studies scholar Matthew Reason reminds us, when engaging with performance documents we are dealing with "representations" of actual events and must consider the issues such as the document's quality, accuracy, completeness and reliability (2006, 74). As Reason (2006) and dance scholar Sherril Dodds (2001) discuss in detail, dance performance recordings range from straightforward documentation (shot with a wide lens camera), to staged "for-

the-camera” studio performances and various liberal adaptations that depart from the original stage creation. Some dance films go through intensive editing that alters the appearance of the performance (as in the case of Balanchine’s 1973 recordings in Germany by director Hugo Niebeling). Sound synchronisation in many television and film recordings may not replicate the performance faithfully, and the timing slippage may misrepresent the dancer’s musical interpretation. In result, the spectator’s perception of movement-music relationship may shift. Older reproductions of dance performances (which is relevant to Balanchine’s recordings) sometimes do not have a sound component at all.

Some of the required audio and lighting adjustments may have greatly influenced dancers’ performances during the early years of filming. As television producer Jac Venza points out, technological restrictions in the 1950s and 1960s necessitated that dances be presented in the studio setting (2003, 4). During studio filming, the dancers had to adjust their performing approach to more restricted spaces and conditions such as increased lighting and very hard floors. For instance, Venza explained that solid floors were required due to the heavy camera equipment, and therefore the dancers often had to perform on a concrete (2003, 9). Some studio adaptations, however, are recognised by experts as acceptable alternatives to theatre recordings of live performance. (*Dance in America*, a series produced for the public television network PBS, was carefully produced to minimise the impact of studio alterations. This series includes several films of Balanchine’s ballets, including *The Four Temperaments* and *Agon* which are used in this study.)<sup>22</sup>

Most of the recordings used in this study capture live theatre events. These are mostly archival films produced for the internal purposes of the ballet companies. Typically these films use a wide-angle camera approach in order to capture the whole spatial organisation on stage. In this sense, some films are better quality than others. For example, the performance recordings of The Royal Ballet or Ballett Frankfurt from the 1990s are superior to those of the National Ballet of Canada during the same time. The Canadian films typically only had a distant panoramic view, while the Royal Ballet recordings included a close-shot screen of the soloist in conjunction with the wide-angle view.

As Reason (2006, 3) reminds us, it is crucial to keep in mind that each record is a testimony of a single performance, and the judgements made should not be more general than that. This study recognises this issue, and it is not assumed that all the performances by the same dancer in the particular leotard ballet role over time had identical, or nearly identical, execution. Rather, the performance records are viewed as a sample of the performer's overall approach, and the dancer is asked in interviews about what changes they may have included or planned to include in the role over time.

More than one recording of a particular dancer performing in the same work was examined whenever possible. For example, the National Ballet of Canada was able to provide several recordings of *the second detail*, two of which were from the early period, 1991-92, when the work was performed by an almost identical cast. Whenever possible, as in the cases of the Canadian productions of *the second detail* (2008) and *The Four Temperaments* (2009), the analysis included an observation of the dancer in the studio, in addition to live and filmed performances.

The reality is, however, that it is rarely possible to view several films of the same performer in the given role. Of all the challenges that accompany filmed representations of dance performances, the fact that they are far from abundant is perhaps the biggest one. In many cases only one performance is documented, or its document preserved. Furthermore, during the course of this research, finding films of Ballett Frankfurt, for example, was a major challenge as the company's archival documentation was not available. There are however several archival projects about particular works. Probably the best known is the digital archiving project that captures various elements of a single choreographic work, *One Flat Thing, Reproduced* (2000). The archive, entitled *Synchronous Objects* (2009)<sup>23</sup>, captures the creation of the performance, as well as the dancers' process and perspective.

Another archived work, preserved in a very different format, records the 1991 version of *The Loss of Small Detail* (including *the second detail*). Produced by Preston-Dunlop (2009) and housed in the LABAN conservatory in London, *The Loss Project* is a combination of physical archive and a DVD with digital maps explaining various components of the dance. The physical holdings in this archive also include useful documents such as rehearsal notes, composer's notes and scores, the dancers' insight, and literature references that document various facets of this work. Due to its emphasis on the particular work of relevance for this study, this archive's documentation was very useful. While not focused on *the second detail* as fully, the documents help explain the full two-part work (which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5), and the processes behind it. Due to the inclusion of various materials, in conjunction with other available documents (for example Caspersen, 2000; Figgis, 1996), *The Loss Project* allows the researcher to better understand the artistic culture and working methodology of dancers in the Ballett

Frankfurt.<sup>24</sup> Another relevant film of Ballett Frankfurt's performance of *The Loss of Small Detail* was found in the internal archive of the National Ballet of Canada (Ballett Frankfurt, 2002b). Finally, the dancers' personal archives were of precious significance: Caspersen, in particular, generously provided several film excerpts of her performances, including a duet from *Artifact* (1994) that is closely related to the movement content in *Steptext*.

For Balanchine's recordings, an early visit to the New York Public Library (2004) was of great importance, as I had the opportunity to view many films of leotard ballets, including *Agon* in a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation recording from c.1960 with almost complete original cast. New York City Ballet examples in this study, however, are most often from the available *Dance in America* recordings and the *The Interpreters Archive* of the George Balanchine Foundation. The films of repertory companies were found in their resident archives. The National Ballet of Canada had holdings of several recordings of Balanchine and Forsythe ballets, while the Video Archive of the Royal Opera House Collections provided films of six leotard ballets by Balanchine and Forsythe. Online presentations by Dresden Semper Oper Ballett, as well as film excerpts of the Norwegian National Ballet, offered additional analytical material. The University of Roehampton library holds several key recordings, including a 1997 BBC2 telecast featuring The Royal Ballet's performance of Forsythe and Balanchine works (MacGibbon, 1997).

## 2.8 ETHNOGRAPHIC ASPECTS: SPRADLEY'S MODEL

As explained in the previous sections, qualitative fieldwork is an important component that brings forth the performer's perspective. Since all the dancers in this study are experts in their field, and they are considered for their individual approaches, the interviewing is conceived in terms of open-ended conversations (rather than set questionnaires). All the interviews, however, have a general structure of core questions (see Appendix 2). In structuring such interviews, as well as other the elements of fieldwork, James P. Spradley's ethnographic models (1979 and 1980), as a combination of "participant observation" and open-ended interviews, proved particularly useful.

Spradley's method aims to enable researchers to step outside of their own cultural background, prior to the interviewing or observation. Spradley's understanding of "ethnography" relates to "the work of describing a culture" and, rather than "studying people", it proposes "learning from" them (1979, 3). Spradley emphasises one of the core anthropological concepts: if the purpose of a research is to understand others, then the analysis must be mindful of the subjects' cultural concepts (1979, 18). The meaning of actions and concepts is embedded in the use of language and terminology within a particular culture, and a researcher unfamiliar with the given culture may pose questions in a way that produces misleading answers (Spradley, 1979, 5-18).<sup>25</sup> The present study was thus conducted with sensitivity to the dancer's own concepts and terminology, considered as a culturally pre-determined set of references. For example, it is already established in 1.1 that Balanchine objected to the idea of "abstract" dance. When having a conversation with dancers who worked directly with him, the term "abstract" is used with care; as a

potentially contentious concept it might turn the respondent's answer away from the actual topics of the interview. To access the culture and its concepts, interviews should be preceded with some "participant observation", a method in qualitative fieldwork defined as "the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities" (Kawulich, 2005, online).

Spradley's system of ethnographic interviewing is carefully structured with explicit aims in mind, even though it shares many features with simple open-ended everyday conversation. According to Spradley, an ethnographic interview should be built on a combination of three types of questions:

- descriptive
- structural, and
- contrasting (1979, 59-60).

"Descriptive" questions allow an insight into the respondent's frame of reference and sampling of terminology and thus typically open the conversation. For example, one of the descriptive questions in this study, adapted from Spradley, was: "Please describe your usual rehearsal process". "Structural questions" reveal particular facets of the respondent's culture for example, "How would you describe [particular role] to someone who had not seen it before?". Finally, "contrasting questions" illuminate the interviewee's personal understanding of the familiar concepts for example: "What is the difference between performing plotless and narrative ballets?" Such basic structure in the interviews was very



useful, and the individual responses then led towards more personalised follow-up questions.

“Participant observation” as a complementary method facilitated a greater understanding of the dancer’s culture. Following Spradley, this observation was typically conducted in the earlier stages of the study. For example, during 2008-2009 while I was residing in Toronto, I observed the creative process of dancers in the National Ballet of Canada as often as possible, in several types of working situations (in rehearsals and during stagings of several leotard ballets, including *the second detail*, in 2008, and *The Four Temperaments* in 2009). Furthermore, I observed several daily “company classes” and attended rehearsals of new and re-mounted productions.<sup>26</sup> Viewing the back-stage process of ballets other than Balanchine and Forsythe helped me to understand the culture and to see dancers working in various styles and performing situations.

Wulff explained the methodological complexities for ethnographic researchers who may find themselves fluctuating between the outsider and insider role as the relationship between the company members and ethnographer gradually develops (1998b, 9-16). Wulff aspired to acquire a “form of nativeness” that would allow her closer contact with various structures in the company (1998b, 10). In my study I aimed to remain in one role: a “passive participant” or the cultural outsider who does not partake in the culture directly, but assumes a role that is acceptable and accepted. This is the position recommended by Spradley as the optimal means to acquire knowledge about a culture, its language and customs, without the subjects questioning the observer’s degree of understanding,<sup>27</sup> or becoming too close to them and thereby increasing the bias (1980, 58). In my case, a role

of a spectator/writer in the studio was an accepted position in the backstage/studio environment of the National Ballet of Canada.

A similar type of participant observation was extended to the professional classes of Canada's National Ballet School. While I was an adult student at the school, I could still assume "cultural outsider" position in a professional class. In particular, during the school's anniversary celebration in November 2009<sup>28</sup> I could observe the work of guest teachers from different international companies. The classes, for instance, were taught by Gailene Stock from The Royal Ballet School, Elisabeth Platel from L'École de Danse de l'Opéra de Paris, Martine Lamy from Canada's National Ballet School and by former Ballett Frankfurt dancer Shaun Amyot, who gave a workshop on Forsythe's Improvisation Technique.

In all these situations in which I was assuming a passive participant role, my previous experiences came in useful. I knew the ballet class culture as a dance student, and understood how to navigate the professional company environment (from the studios of Belgrade Opera Ballet<sup>29</sup> and The National Ballet of Canada's insider events<sup>30</sup>). I interviewed the dancers as a spectator who was trying to understand their culture. In several cases I assumed the role of "partial participant": an ethnographer who is not integrated in the culture, but who can participate in some aspects of or events within it (see Spradley, 1980, 58). For example, in workshops open to the public, I took the opportunity to learn about particular movement styles through embodied experiences. I participated in a two-day workshop for professional dancers (*Improvisation in Creation and Performance Workshop*, Toronto, November 2009) taught by Ballett Frankfurt's former dancer and choreographer Crystal Pite. This type of participation allowed me to directly experience

basic aspects of Forsythe's approach. Also as a partial participant, I worked as a volunteer in the set up of the Choreographic Object *Scattered Crowd* in London in 2009, which provided additional insight into the behind-the-scene company culture and team-work ethics.

While I was not able to do an equal amount of ethnographic work in all the companies, these experiences helped me to understand the basic organisational differences and working processes across different company cultures. Similar information was implicit in the observations of different staging approaches by former Balanchine and Forsythe dancers. Such observation also gives some indications about the main differences and similarities between different company cultures. For example, while staging *the second detail*, Johnson often asked Canadian dancers to improvise shorter movement phrases and transitional steps. Not many of the dancers seemed comfortable doing this as they were not accustomed to improvisation. Particular details were also followed up later in the interviews with the dancers, répétiteurs and staging experts, in their role as informants about specific cultures.

## 2.9 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2

With the objective of understanding how dancers construe their abstract roles, and observing the dancer's agency in performance of particular leotard ballets, this qualitative study combines the perspectives of the performer and the spectator. Chapter 2 explains major concepts about the dancer's role as theorised from the spectator's perspective (2.1), but also how practitioners research their own work (2.2), as well as how particular researchers integrate both viewpoints (2.3).

The study's methodology (2.4) aims to bridge the two perspectives by combining an historical approach (analyses of performances by different dancers across time, drawing on various historical sources, including filmed records and Laban's conceptual frameworks, as discussed in 2.5-2.7), with ethnographic methods ("participant observation" and qualitative interviewing, discussed in 2.8). The performer's perspective was accessed through historical and ethnographic components, including a survey of the dancers' accounts in published documents and conversations with selected performers, répétiteurs and staging experts. For the ethnographic components of the study, I draw on Spradley's (1979 and 1980) systems of participant observation and ethnographic interviewing, based on a combination of descriptive, structural and contrast questions and points, aiming to learn from the subjects about their culture and creative process.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 2:

<sup>1</sup> Steve Paxton's talk at Goldsmith's University, London, 18 January 2012.

<sup>2</sup> An earlier influential "anatomy of creativity" by Howard Gardner (1994) considered choreography by Martha Graham as one of his examples, but not focusing on performance.

<sup>3</sup> As Randal Johnson, scholar and editor of Bourdieu's English edition of *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) explains, "both subjectivism and objectivism fail to account for what Bourdieu refers to as the 'objectivity of the subjective.' Subjectivism fails to grasp the social ground that shapes consciousness, while objectivism does just the opposite, failing to recognise that social reality is to some extent shaped by the conceptions and representations that individuals make of the social world" (Johnson, 1993, 4).

<sup>4</sup> David Woodruff-Smith, for example explores the "phenomenology of action" as an "experience of acting, or doing something, especially doing something consciously and intentionally" (1992, 119).

<sup>5</sup> Armelagos and Sirridge (1984) differentiated between the overall style of the dance work (which they denote as "the style1"), which consists of the spatial movement vocabulary and, the dancer's individual performing style ("style2"). In this sense the "style2" is separate, but integral to the overall style ("style1").

<sup>6</sup> To illustrate, Foster (1986, 77) used Laban's *effort* terminology to compare two dancers' performances of the *Swan Lake* — one approached the role of Odette with "a light, tentative" movement quality, thereby indicating the "delicate, ethereal identity" of the character, while the other dancer showed "more force, directness, and quickness," perhaps as to indicate Odette's conviction and expression.

<sup>7</sup> This range is well demonstrated in a recent collection by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2007) *Practice as Research: Context, Method, Knowledge*. London: I.B.Tauris.

<sup>8</sup> Dennett's idea has to be considered with reservations. His critics objected to the method as misleading and disregarding of the "conceptual autonomy of the personal level". (See "Beyond Dennett's Eliminativism: Recovering the Personal in Cognitive Science," in Evan Thompson, Alva Noë and Luiz Pessoa, 1999). Dennett enters into the polemics with his critics in the articles "Heterophenomenology explained" (2003) and "Heterophenomenology Reconsidered" (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Ballett Frankfurt, American Ballet Theatre, England's Royal Ballet and the Royal Swedish Ballet.

<sup>10</sup> Wulff presented her detailed observations of the process behind the preparations of Forsythe's 1995 ballet *Firsttext* — an original choreography for the Royal Ballet, co-choreographed by Forsythe, Caspersen and dancer Anthony Rizzi.

<sup>11</sup> Roses-Thema (2008) suggests Langer's 1951 *Philosophy in a New Key* as the key work that opened a sensitive inquiry into the dance performance from the spectator's perspective.

<sup>12</sup> Kirsh does not name the company in his research, but the scope of collaboration is explained in several places, including Jagoda (2008, online) and in the interviews and articles by research director of Random Dance, Scott deLahunta. (For example, see deLahunta's "Working Processes and Digital Realms," accessed at: <http://www.body-pixel.com/2011/02/09/interview-with-scott-delahunta-part-1-on-working-processes-and-digital-realms/>)

<sup>13</sup> This training in the MA core module "Materials and Methods for Movement Observation" (completed in 2004 at York University, Toronto Canada) included basics of the Bartenieff system and studies of Laban's analytical frameworks.

<sup>14</sup> Adult ballet training in Canada's National Ballet School (as a feeding institution for the National Ballet of Canada) is significant as it relates to the pedagogical strategies of the school's professional programme. (The school maintains that all professional and non-professional programmes should reflect the same values, teaching strategies and methodologies.) For example, as observed during my ethnographic observation of professional classes in 2009, these modules and the Adult ballet training integrate very similar exercises by Irene Dowd, from her system of neuromuscular dance science.

<sup>15</sup> The issue of applying Laban's concepts to the various cultural contexts has been studied by scholars such as Jean Johnson-Jones (who used Labanotation in the study of African Nama-Staap dance), and recently discussed by Jane Carr (2010). Eden Davies's collection argues against the positioning of Laban's concepts toward Western dance 2001, *Beyond Dance: Laban's legacy of movement analysis*, London: Brechin Books Ltd.

<sup>16</sup> "Choreutics" as a term is used since 1920s, but Preston-Dunlop suggested that original form (as left by Laban), is considered too broad to be usable for the analysis of contemporary choreographic practices (1983, 77).

<sup>17</sup> *Motif writing* was conceived by Preston-Dunlop and Hutchinson Guest, and it was Preston-Dunlop who published the first collection in 1967 (Preston-Dunlop, 1967a-d). Hutchinson Guest subsequently expanded and developed the system, and its practical application within the Language of Dance Centre, London UK. See, *An Introduction to Motif Notation* and *Your Move: A New Approach to the Study of Movement and Dance* (2007), co-authored with Tina Curran.

<sup>18</sup> The concept of the *effort* and its notation developed after the World War II. The term represents loosely translated original Laban's term "antrieb", which stood for the kinetic motivation in the movement of the dancer, and which is better understood as an "impulse" (in Preston-Dunlop, 1998, 36). *Effort* is now widely used and understood as an integral part of the Laban system. In addition to Lamb who developed the "Shape" concept, Bartenieff as another Laban's student spread the concept known as the "Effort/Shape" system in the United States (see Youngerman, 1984, 106).

<sup>19</sup> As given in the translation of his "Principles of Orientation in Space" published in an excerpt of *Choreutics* in McCaw (2011, 184).

<sup>20</sup> The title of the first version did not include article "The", which was included in the title of the new 1991 work that integrates some concepts from the previous ballets, but also new ideas, as well as *the second detail*.

<sup>21</sup> There is a difference however in the way this perceived off-balance movement is explored in the Forsythe work which will be explained further in Chapter 5.

<sup>22</sup> The production of the *Dance in America* series is explained in Venza (2003). Balanchine's former assistant Barbara Horgan has noted that Canadian CBC dance recordings from the 1960s were also produced with the great input by Balanchine (in Greskovic, 2003, 30).

<sup>23</sup> Forsythe worked with a team from the Department of Dance, ACCAD Ohio State University. The project was co-authored by a team of researchers, including Norah Zuniga Shaw, Scott deLahunta, and Alva Noë, but also by the choreographer and his dancers (including Johnson, Christopher Roman and Elizabeth Waterhouse) (See Forsythe, Palazzi, Shaw et.al., 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Another of Forsythe's archiving projects titled *Motion Bank* (led by Scott deLahunta) focuses on the choreographic creative process and the notion of choreographic scores, and investigates various methods of annotating choreographic texts.

<sup>25</sup> Spradley uses examples from his own research of homeless men — had he had not taken the time to understand the culture and language of his respondents, he would have received misleading answers to his questions. For example, a question "Where do you live?" was interpreted as "What is your home address?" in which case the answer most likely would be "I don't have one." But, if the community slang is used, the same question would be "Where do you flop?" and thus the answer would provide meaningful information, e.g., "I usually stay/flop by the waterfront" (Spradley, 1979, 19).

<sup>26</sup> In addition to the observation of the two ballets in the study, I also attended rehearsals for Robbins's leotard ballet *Glass Pieces* (1983), and observed early stages of creation Crystal Pite's *Emergence* (2009).

<sup>27</sup> Wulff explains that over time she was becoming well known to the dancers which did not work in her favour always. During one interview a dancer dismissed her question because he felt that Wulff already knew the answer to it (1998, 15).

<sup>28</sup> The classes were observed during the 50th anniversary of Canada's National Ballet School, *Assemblée Internationale* 15-22 November 2009 [[http://www.nbs-enb.ca/50th/ai09\\_nov21.aspx](http://www.nbs-enb.ca/50th/ai09_nov21.aspx)]

<sup>29</sup> During my studies in the fine arts, my practice in studio drawing included visitations to Belgrade National Ballet, and the observation of rehearsals where I practiced quick sketching of fast-paced movement.

<sup>30</sup> During my writing assignments for the *Orchestra Dance Magazine* (Belgrade) between 2000-2009, I was occasionally invited as a journalist to attend the company's publicity events that often involved observing parts of rehearsals in the studio.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CONTEXT OF THE DANCER'S PERFORMANCE: TRAINING AND COMPANY CULTURE

#### 3.0 INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF THE DANCER'S WORK

Dance anthropologist Brenda Farnell argued that a researcher who analyses body movements and assigns meanings to them should be careful not to interpret aspects of the performance entirely according to their own language and culture, without attention to the performer's understanding of the same event (1999, 147). As discussed in Chapter 2, several dance scholars — including Morris (2000), Salosaari (2002), Roses-Thema, (2008), Whatley (2002), and Wulff (1998b) — have found that various aspects of the training background and the working environment function as significant influences over a dancer's contribution, performing style and overall approach. As found by Roses-Thema (2008) and Farrell (quoted in the Introduction, p.2), other aspects may also influence the dancer's performance. These can include various circumstances of an inter- and intra-personal nature (that may emerge during certain distinct periods or around the time of particular performance), or the conditions of the individual event: its setting and the dancer's relationship with a particular audience. Furthermore, logistical factors such as the conditions of different performance spaces (for instance, the conditions of filming discussed in 2.7), and even changes in the dancer's attire (the technological improvements in the material of leotard costume or in the construction of the pointe shoes), should all be kept in mind when different performances of the same role across time are juxtaposed and

analysed. This is why it could be concluded that the network of internal and external influences that affect the dancer's performance is extremely complex.

This intricate web would be very difficult to analyse by pointing out specific direct, causal connections in each performance for each dancer, although that could be one way of investigating the performance in leotard ballets. The totality of the underlying influences, however, may be understood in terms of Bourdieu's concept of "habitus"<sup>1</sup> (mentioned in 2.1): an active and dynamic structure of internalised behaviours, knowledge, personal and cultural histories, and the overall connections that constitute a contextual plane of action, in this case: the performance. Bourdieu defines habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" or:

...principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them. Objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (Bourdieu, 1990/1980, 53).

In this sense, a dancer's performance may be explained as a result of, as well as a response to, the personal and group history, social dispositions and rules, and be tied to a set of pre-acquired behaviours and values that may keep changing and of which the performer may not be consciously aware. As Bourdieu explains, each agent's "dispositions" constitute "the subjective basis of the perception and appreciation of the objective chances" as well as representing "the objective probabilities...inscribed in the field at a given moment" (Bourdieu, 1993, 64).



In his overview of historical concepts of “habitus”, theorist Omar Lizardo finds that Bourdieu’s definition is more inclusive than earlier uses of the term (2012, 1). In Bourdieu’s theory, Lizardo argues, habitus functions both as “an acquired system of schemes” — knowledge processed as “everyday instances of perception” — and also as “the producer of action” (as well as “of mundane judgments” such as moral reasoning, “propriety or impropriety”, or “judgments of taste such as likes and dislikes”, and so on). In this sense, habitus acts as a “form of internalised necessity” which, as “a product of the environmental conditions that the person encounters during ontogenetic development”, influences the agent’s behaviour (2012, 1). As Bourdieu summarised elsewhere, the “structures are objectivities irreducible to their manifestation in the habitus which they produce and which tend to reproduce them” (Bourdieu, 1977, 84).

Some studies analyse the performance in this sense. For example, Roche (2008) used the concept of habitus in reference to her own performances, and explained the dancer as a historically and culturally located person, much more than a “neutral ‘instrument’” onto which choreography is fitted. The dancer, it is argued, is an agent who in different ways accesses internalised knowledge that is available to be “re-embodied” again. Theatre scholar Maria Shevtsova also engages with Bourdieu’s concepts, including the “habitus” (2003, 13). In her discussion of Forsythe’s process, Shevtsova describes “the group habitus of dance practitioners” as “the perceptual and evaluative predispositions of ballet professionals, as incarnated in their practice” (2003, 13).

How “habitus” may transpire as a factor in the work of the dancers in this study is seen when analysing the relationships between performing approaches and the creative

processes of various dancers. Sometimes it is obvious how dancers internalise diverse information from their social setting and how this knowledge then (as a form of “cultural capital”) affects their thinking processes and performing approaches, whether or not they are aware that their reactions are part of the active learning in their environment. For example, Balanchine preferred that his dancers did not over-rehearse, which in some cases directly influenced the dancer’s level of preparedness, or confidence, to try new things. Eric Bruhn, a ballet star who joined New York City Ballet as a guest artist in the 1960s, was invited by Balanchine when he was at his peak, when he was a fully formed dance artist who trained and built his career in a very different ballet culture. Bruhn could not adapt to Balanchine’s methods, and feeling a deep frustration with this practice of under-rehearsing, he quickly retreated from the collaboration (as explained in Gruen, 1979). Farrell, who was brought up and developed as an artist in close proximity with Balanchine, completely adopted and internalised the rehearsing strategy and often expressed that “over-rehearsing a part” could “kill any spontaneity on stage” (Farrell, 1990, 111). This ballerina felt that a dancer cannot rehearse “for the performance”, an event which she felt was in the realm of unknown. Farrell wondered what a dancer would do if all the rehearsed elements did not align in the moment of performance. For her, rehearsals meant “exploring options” (for example, rehearsing the choreography backwards), rather than trying to achieve a particular level of preparation.

While it would be fascinating to examine what “habitus” might mean for each dancer in this cross-cultural study of ballet performance, such an approach is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, aiming to inform movement analysis in the upcoming case studies with

the understanding of the dancer's contextual circumstances (in keeping with Farrell, above), this chapter focuses on the aspects that are arguably the most relevant for all the dancers involved: different types of learning which occurs in various forms during the dancer's career, and the company culture as a social system, which partly informs the dancer's habitus. As may be understood from the Bruhn and Farrell examples above, the first component — the dancer's training — is understood in this research more inclusively than just the dancer's comprehension of codified ballet technique and styles. The training rather denotes the scope of embodied and cultural knowledge that the dancer acquires and internalises throughout their whole career. The next sections clarify how the complexity of the different components of "the dancer's training" can be understood in relation to the performances in this study.

### 3.1 TRAINING IN THE BALLET SCHOOL

As with Roche's point about the dancer's internalised knowledge (cited above), in her study of Ashton's style, Morris explained how performers inevitably bring their body of knowledge to their performing styles (2000). In her analysis of key dancers who inspired Ashton, Morris demonstrated why ballet education cannot be viewed as a singular concept, even though it applies to one style of dance. What may be perceived as desirable in one school or ballet style is not necessarily adaptable to another (Morris, 2000, 16). Many additional influences, including the teacher's approach and individual interpretations of a particular style of movement, may affect the dancer's understanding and embodiment of the technique.

As noted by Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg, technical training affects more than the performer's style of movement, as dance students adopt the school's general "manner of thinking" about movement (2002, 76) and, I would add, they also develop dispositions about performing. As I learnt in my interviews with performers, different dancers have different perceptions about aspects of their ballet school training, that they feel mostly inform their performing styles. For example, some dancers praised "strength" and "versatility", or what they perceive as a set of diverse stylistic qualities that help them to be prepared for emulating different choreographic styles (as expressed by Canadian former principal dancers Jennifer Fournier, 27 April 2011 and Martine Lamy, 15 April 2011). Others spoke about an internal awareness of movement for which they credited their ballet school training (as in the case of Aleksandar Antonijevic, 23 October 2009). Some dancers emphasised specific stylistic qualities that helped them articulate their artistic ideas (an "expressive" port de bras, for example, emphasised by Hayley Forskitt, 28 April 2011).

Morris showed that ballet school training in the early twentieth century was already very complex, because the dancers began to study with several teachers, or to study different ballet styles during their careers. It is even more difficult to analyse the training backgrounds of different dancers in the second half of the century, and today. For example, as Wulff (1998a) explained in detail, Ballett Frankfurt dancers joined the company from very diverse training backgrounds and ballet cultures, and this is also the case in the key international repertory companies in this study. Although both the National Ballet of Canada and the Royal Ballet have their affiliated schools, the roster of dancers — particularly of soloists in the past two decades who are the most important performers for this study — reflects the diversity of international ballet culture.

The training of the New York City Ballet dancers may seem the most monolithic among all the companies in this study. This is because dancers during the Balanchine era most often joined from the School of American Ballet, where training was modelled on Balanchine's own training background (the pre-Vaganova system of the Russian Imperial Ballet School). Dancers Merrill Ashley, Maria Calegari and Bart Cook all joined Balanchine's company from the School of American Ballet. Upon a closer analysis, however, it can be easily seen that this training is not unified either. Cook, for example, joined the institution only in the final years of his study and his earlier technical training involved other smaller schools. Furthermore, stylistic and pedagogical shifts have inevitably occurred within the School of American Ballet over time, with new teachers interpreting technical requirements in their own ways. For example, Calegari credits Suki Schorer (who did not teach the Imperial Ballet style, but was a promoter of the "Balanchine technique": see Schorer, 1999) as the teacher in the School of American Ballet whose pedagogy crucially shaped her as a performer (Calegari, interview, 14 December 2011). By the time Schorer joined the school in the early 1970s, Ashley was already dancing in the company (and had been since 1967), and hence her training was different from Calegari's. More infrequently, some dancers came to the Balanchine company as fully formed performers from other schools and companies. Another dancer in this study, Violette Verdy, trained in several French schools and danced in various companies before accepting Balanchine's invitation to join his troupe in 1958.

As contemporary ballet school training is even more complex, dancers from most major schools often reflect the diversity which is a strategy of many international ballet training institutions today. The dancers of Canada's National Ballet School illustrate this point well.

Since the early 1980s, the aim of the institution was to expose the dancers to many styles of ballet. This concept was carried out through the teaching curriculum, where the previous domination of Cecchetti and RAD syllabi was replaced with the teaching of most major ballet training styles (including the Vaganova system and Paris Opera Ballet style). Furthermore, since the early 1990s, the dancers systematically learned contemporary dance techniques (including Limón and Graham), as well as historical dance styles (Renaissance and Baroque) and cross-cultural non-theatre dances (at various times these included Flamenco and classical Indian dance forms). Today, the students also learn choreography, and improvisation,<sup>2</sup> and are educated in the principles of body science (the system of American neuromuscular specialist Irene Dowd).<sup>3</sup>

I agree with Wulff's conclusion that contemporary professional ballet education is best described as an amalgam of training styles and influences (1998b, 42). Wulff views this trend as a result of the "transnationality" of contemporary ballet culture, where teachers and students increasingly mix from diverse international training backgrounds and ballet cultures. The dancers whose performances are analysed in the case studies in Chapters 4 and 5 are thus viewed as performers who have internalised a very complex training background, often integrating a range of stylistic and technical knowledge. All the dancers are interviewed about their training and asked about the elements that they found crucial. However, while the training background of each dancer thus informs the analysis, it is discussed in the case study only if it emerges, or one of its particular components comes to light as a clear influence on the conception and performing approach of a particular dancer in a particular role.

### 3.2 TRAINING IN THE COMPANY

The dancer's education continues after the school training and throughout the career. In the repertory ballet companies the training is structured as a combination of daily ballet classes and stylistic coaching sessions which are sometimes especially individualised for soloists. This internal training is based on the requirements of the company repertoire. The company classes, as the core training for all dancers, are designed to build and maintain the performer's technical level and stamina, but sometimes also to refine particular movement qualities and aspects of stage performing (refinement classes). As ethnographic research in the National Ballet of Canada and recent open presentations of the Royal Ballet show,<sup>4</sup> a quotidian company class is very similar to a high-level professional ballet class, preparing dancers for their daily work, promoting strength, but also providing conditioning and injury prevention. Additional training and coaching sessions prepare the dancers to adjust to various choreographic styles, or learn particular repertoire.

In the two resident companies discussed here, the daily training was structured to respond to the two choreographers' respective styles and interests, in both cases blending aspects of training with the creative process. In Ballett Frankfurt, where dancers had a strong ballet background, the daily ballet class was a consistent method. In addition, Forsythe developed an exploratory methodology which was used in rehearsals, choreography and performance. Caspersen suggested that such exploration represented a useful way to "promote an inventive curiosity" in dancers (2000, 26). In this sense it is important to emphasise that Forsythe's unique daily process integrated movement with conceptual work by giving various cognitive tasks to the dancers.<sup>5</sup> The Ballett Frankfurt training was described by

Caspersen as a combination of ballet classes and daily collaborative improvisational events (2000, 26). From various documents and conversations with performers (Caspersen 2000, 26-28; and personal interviews with Caspersen, 2011a and 2011b; Galloway, 2011; Gates, 2011; Johnson, 2008; and Pite, 2008) it becomes apparent how such combined training resulted in the development of a community which operated through complex collaborative creative processes. An outside spectator may get some sense of this exploration by observing the *Improvisation Technologies*, but perhaps in conjunction with Figgis's 1996 film. As Caspersen cautions us, the improvisation technologies, which represented "ways to create or modify movement", were not directly related to performances. Such exercises "were originally intended ... as a way to break out of habits by becoming more conscious of what we were doing, by growing our capacity to differentiate." Therefore, the dancers were not "constrained" by the methods of improvisational technologies. "[R]ather, those codified some of the processes that came out of our work" (Caspersen, email correspondence, 29 August, 2012).

Balanchine's choreographic approach required a different style of consistent and highly structured training, where the company class with the choreographer was the key component. As a refinement class, this training aimed to prepare the dancers to develop abilities that served Balanchine's choreographic needs. As most of his dancers explain (including Boos, 1995; Daniel and Farrell, 1993a; Schorer, 1999; and Walczak, 2008) these classes focused on increasing the speed of movement and its quick initiation. Furthermore, Balanchine preferred dancing with the use of large *kinesphere*, and dancers were trained to explore the edge of their balance. Most importantly, all these elements were intended to



foster the performer's ability to articulate music in various ways. As former dancer and current Balanchine staging expert Paul Boos explains, the choreographer's class honed the ability of dancers to use varied dynamics in the execution of basic ballet steps, which were repeated to an extreme degree, many more times than it is usual for a ballet class.

The main thing was that we had to be responsive to every nuance, every variation in the timing of the step. But he [Balanchine] wasn't being arbitrary, he was simply telling us to be limitless in our approach, that we should be unrestricted, that *tendus* could be done a hundred different ways (Boos, 1995, 70).

Farrell's example in *Chaconne* (on p.2) thus may serve as an interesting indication of the possible results of this training approach. Farrell's documents (see, for example, Belle, 1990 and Daniel and Farrell, 1993a-c) explain how such instinctive responses were carefully and gradually built as a skill. (In Daniel and Farrell, 1993a, for instance, Farrell demonstrates several ways of performing grand battement by accenting the same music in different ways.) Farrell also credits Balanchine's class for her quick reactions to unforeseen circumstances — with the development of the speed of movement also came fast thinking (1993a).

Not all the dancers were as enthusiastic about Balanchine's daily class, however. Aforementioned (1.3) protests by Kirkland (1986) extended to the choreographer's training methods. Several other dancers, including Villella (1998), for example, famously avoided Balanchine's classes as they were not gentle on the body, and instead trained with other teachers inside the company (including Stanley Williams). Calegari explains that Balanchine's class was difficult as it was shorter than the traditional one and a half-hour format. Balanchine "only taught for an hour, and mostly like a laboratory — tempi, and

steps, and the way we would do them for the performance. This was very different than a traditional class, and on top of that, you would rehearse all day and have a performance at night, which was quite a drastic change” from the school. The dancers, as Calegari explains, had to supplement the training (for example by taking Pilates classes) and to prepare for the Balanchine class on their own (Calegari, interview, 14 December 2011).

### 3.3 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COACHING PRACTICES

Learning in the rehearsal studio is different to learning in a ballet class or in a company refinement class. Even individualistic ballet classes (such as Balanchine’s) usually follow a familiar structure (at least a basic succession of steps). However, learning in rehearsal is not always so structured, depending on the approach of the répétiteur (who may have previously danced the role) — an external staging expert, a guest invited to work on a particular repertory, or an internal coaching specialist who is in residence in the company.

External staging experts, as former dancers who either created the original role or who worked closely with the choreographer in question, have “an insider” point of reference regarding the ballet, working methods, and style. As external consultants hired by a repertory company to stage a specific choreographic work, staging experts often have very limited time with the dancers (approximately between four to six weeks). Furthermore, their role is usually very broad: in addition to arranging a specific choreographic work with another company’s dancers, they are often responsible for overseeing other production elements (for example, the sound, stage and lighting design as in the case of Johnson in the

National Ballet of Canada's 2008 production of *the second detail*). Their time may thus be divided between various components of the dance work.

Boos explained that his process with the dancers from an international repertory company often involved technical and stylistic adjustments because the dancers have different training backgrounds (1995, 69). Such cultural translations are very important in preparing the dancers for very different choreographic requirements. Similarly, in Forsythe repertory, there is a component of training the dancers to adjust to his particular style and thinking. Sulcas (2004) observed how translation of Forsythe's working process slowly became comfortable for the repertory company dancers (the American Ballet Theatre during the staging of Forsythe's *workwithinwork* in 2003), due to the successful additional training provided by the external staging expert (Johnson). During the initial stages, Johnson introduced elements of cultural translation, "establishing a movement context" and introducing the improvisational exercises that are the basis of the working process in Ballett Frankfurt. When the movement sequences and choreographic steps were subsequently introduced, Johnson did not feel any resistance from the dancers, although some of them were outside of their comfort level when it came to improvisation (in Sulcas, 2004, 60).

Sometimes, however, there is not enough time for appropriate cultural translations of choreography. For example, in the Canadian staging of *the second detail* in 2008, the dancers also had to split their time between rehearsing Harald Lander's classical-style

ballet *Études*, 1948 and James Kudelka's neoclassical version of *Cinderella*, 2004. The rehearsal schedule did not allow enough time for the inclusion of many improvisation exercises that would have helped the new dancers (who did not perform in the 1991 version) to understand Forsythe's style and ideas. Instead, Johnson developed a particular style of rehearsing. For example, in order to get the dancers to enjoy the movement, she taught *the second detail* movement phrases in the earlier rehearsal phase by alternating Willems's electronic score (written for the ballet) with hip hop music. (This was her strategy both with the National Ballet of Canada, as confirmed in interview with Nehemiah Kish, 16 June 2011, and in Norwegian National Ballet, as explained by Forskitt, interview, 28 April 2011). But, as Wulff observed in her ethnographic research with the Royal Ballet, adapting to a choreographic or working style may take quite some time.

Forsythe's own dancers have (in most cases) been practising his steps and concepts for years, some for more than a decade, whereas other dancers usually only have about a month to learn them (Wulff, 1998b, 42).

Some companies have additional training for particular choreographic styles. Repetiteurs, typically internal teachers in the company, have a dedicated role, working with the dancers (often with the soloists) to refine a particular repertoire or choreographic style. The National Ballet of Canada, for example, has two internal Balanchine repetiteurs (Lindsay Fischer and Joysanne Sidimus) who work with dancers at different times. Forsythe choreography, however, is only taught by external staging experts (such as Johnson). In the Royal Ballet, as in many other repertory companies, dancers most often learn a particular choreographic style only from external experts.<sup>6</sup>

The style of coaching (internal or external) is another important aspect that may influence the dancer's approach to a role. To paraphrase a point made by Morris (2000), just as there are more and less prescriptive choreographers, the same could be said about staging experts. Some dancers, such as Geon Van der Wyst (interview, 23 September 2010) explained that the two different Balanchine coaches in the National Ballet of Canada allow varying degrees of freedom to the dancer. (Sidimus is perceived by several dancers as the more liberal repetiteur of the two.) In relation to Balanchine's repertoire, *The Interpreters Archive* series is a useful resource for the observation of the coaching strategies of different staging experts. Furthermore, since Balanchine kept changing the versions of the work, different coaching experts inevitably had different frames of reference (as seen in Marie Jeanne's teaching of the original, 1941 version of *Concerto Barocco*). Therefore, the original dancer, the repetiteur, and the staging expert may have different frames of reference about the same role, and their interpretations of the same work may influence the dancer to perform differently.

A full analysis of the different staging styles and processes in the various versions of the selected leotard ballets in this research is beyond the scope of this study. The issues discussed in sections 3.2 and 3.3 about internal training in the company (as with the issues of ballet school training) informed my analysis of dancers' approaches in various roles. Since this research aims primarily to observe how dancers apply their knowledge and what becomes evident in performance, care is taken to avoid mistaking an element of the staging style, or perhaps a particular request by the repetiteur, for the dancer's own contribution. Staging experts and repetiteurs were consulted whenever possible, and the dancers were asked about specific choreographic requests in their roles.

### 3.4 THE CONTEXT OF COMPANY CULTURE <sup>7</sup>

As already established, performers in a company are part of a particular community and social structure, and this setting may affect their approach and thinking about any given ballet role. The organisation, heritage, and traditions, as well as the type of repertoire, working methods and casting practices all contribute to the social structure of the ballet company and may affect the performer's creative process and performance. Similarly to Wulff (1998a), Whatley found a strong correlation between the company culture and the dancers' performing approaches in affecting the look of the choreography (see 2002, 367 and 2006, 123). As could be expected, the resident company dancers (Siobhan Davies Company) were far more accustomed to the choreographer's method (in this case, they were ready to generate movement when asked); the repertory company dancers (Rambert Dance Company) while not equally well prepared for this type of work, had a greater versatility, as they often have to practice (and frequently multitask) by moving through several distinct styles within the same programme.

In ballet, the model of a repertory company (regional, national or international) is more habitual. These organisations usually have elaborate social structures, defined hierarchy (that influences who dances what) and their (smaller or larger) core repertoire extends the existing ballet traditions. Most often the programming is built for a wide audience, and relies on strong performance of well-known classical ballets from the nineteenth century. More novel works by past and current international choreographers are added to this central programming. Similarly to Whatley's conclusion above, the dancers in these companies are required to multitask and to be able to switch between various

choreographic and ballet styles as promptly as needed <sup>8</sup>, and they are trained accordingly (as noted in the previous section). In the repertory companies, learning the material, in particular the choreographic style, requires careful additional training.

The resident companies are more individualistic and thus may nurture different qualities in their dancers. One of the major differences between the two resident companies in this study was the working style. For example, the manner of communication in Balanchine's studio, as observed by Taper, could be described as non-verbal, or verbally reticent. Ballet, according to Balanchine, was "something you do, not discuss" (Taper, 1984, 6). Taper described the silent atmosphere during the creative process in the studio:

Some choreographers, when beginning a new ballet, like to discuss their intentions at some length with the dancers, but Balanchine, who considered cerebration a deadly menace for dancers, preferred to engage in as little talk as possible... "All right," Balanchine would say, stepping over to one of his soloists – the principal ballerina, perhaps – "you do like this". And he would dance out for her the steps he had conceived, counting aloud each beat of the phrase as he did so. She would immediately reproduce his movements while echoing his count (Taper, 1984, 14).

Of course, there are also plenty of anecdotes about Balanchine's imagery and succinct verbal communication in the studio (as vividly explained in Daniel and Farrell 1993a, or Walczak and Kai, 2008, 228). Nevertheless, just as Taper's anecdote illustrates, most dancers emphasise Balanchine's preference for giving directions through the embodied demonstration of a step, rather than through words.

This atmosphere seems in direct contrast with dancers' descriptions of Forsythe's process in the Ballett Frankfurt. As documents from *The Loss Project* reveal, discussions and verbal communication were among the core aspects of the creative process in Forsythe's realm (Preston-Dunlop, 2009). As Johnson explained:

He [Forsythe] would always solicit, “if you don’t understand something, put your hands up,” and he’d explain. And we’d gain something from that. And this was true, it wasn’t just something he said. It was the practice, and we had some great discussions (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008).

Furthermore, talking about movement was a logical outcome of the improvisational base of the choreography, which meant that the work on movement was highly individualistic. The dancers therefore had to collaborate and develop verbal (as well as instructional) skills.

Since the work in Frankfurt was so specific, to each person — particularly if there was improvisation — there was no way that the ballet master would be able to record or transmit what everyone was thinking and doing in their improvised sections. To translate from one dancer to the other meant having that collective experience. We all learnt how to be teachers ... Bill would say “Ok, you’re doing this section exactly how I want it, can you teach us all? What is it you’re thinking of, how are you doing it?” So the person would say “I start with this”. And then someone would say, “I don’t understand. What do you mean by ‘start with...?’” We all went through that, and had to learn how to articulate what we were thinking (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008).

Such an approach is not often practiced in the repertory companies. Johnson explains that, while working with the choreographer as a young corps de ballet dancer in Canada (during the creation of the 1991 *the second detail*), she was particularly taken with Forsythe’s request: “Show me what you think”. Until then Johnson had been accustomed to the (perhaps more traditional) expectation that the dancer would look to a director or choreographer for direction — “You don’t move until you’re told to” (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008). Johnson explained that the working methods of the National Ballet of Canada and Ballett Frankfurt were so dissimilar that she had to reposition her performing attitude/behaviour.

I remember, when I first did Bill's [Forsythe's] work, thinking “I don't want to do it wrong,” but then just deciding to go for it. You have to push past what you think is “right”. The freedom of that can be a little daunting, but it's ultimately



liberating (Johnson, cited in Sulcas, 2004).

Such cultural differences are not always easily reconciled. As was widely reported (for example, in Wulff, 1998a, 113-114 and Mackrell, 1995), Forsythe learnt that his working process was not easily translated into the culture of the Royal Ballet.<sup>9</sup>

Equally, such cultural differences can be quite successfully bridged through careful cultural translations, as explained in the previous section. In recent interviews, Forsythe quite often expressed his interest in seeing his choreography performed by other dancers (Brown, 2012; Crompton, 2011; Sadler's Wells Screen, 2010). As he explained, his expectations in such cases were different from those he had of his own performers (Forsythe in Sadler's Wells Screen, 2010). From the international dancers, Forsythe hoped to see how the dancer interprets movement through their own training style (for example, with dancers from the Mariinsky Ballet). As he later explained to Brown, Forsythe was interested in performers who can develop an investigative relationship with the choreography (Forsythe, cited in Brown, 2012).

In this sense, it is interesting to observe how cultural differences in reality may affect the look of the dance. The example of the two versions of *the second detail* (the National Ballet of Canada's original and Ballet Frankfurt's later version in 1991) is illustrative. Martine Lamy (who created one of the solo roles in the first version of *the second detail*) was in a unique position to observe the differences between methods and resulting versions when she was invited to teach the choreography to Forsythe's resident dancers.<sup>10</sup> Lamy

explains the differences in the working process that resulted in a different performing approach in the Frankfurt adaptation six months after the Canadian premiere:

It was different to see how he [Forsythe] works with his own dancers and with us. ... He had them write things down ... they all had their notepads all the time, and they would write down either themes, or actual parts of pieces, their thoughts. ... He used notebook approach a lot with them which was interesting. ... It was really fascinating to watch (Lamy, interview, 15 April, 2011).

As a result, Lamy found the Ballett Frankfurt version to be more daring and danced at a faster pace. “He just filled it out more”. The same choreographic phrases were expanded, infused with more steps (with “more choreography”), and with amplified movement challenges (“bigger jumps” and more off-balance movement content).

From these illustrations and the discussion in this section it becomes clear that, as important as it is to understand the training, it is just as crucial to understand the overall culture, its values, aims and objectives (set by the resident artistic director and, in some cases, the principal choreographer). All these elements combined influence the dancer’s internalised knowledge (by adopting and rejecting specific elements of their training and culture), and make up a framework for understanding the individual performer’s role.

### 3.5 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 3

The analysis of dancers’ interpretations in leotard ballets in this study takes into consideration the context of the dancer’s performance, as the researcher’s understanding of the performer’s culture may affect their analysis of the dance (Farnell, 1999). This study therefore recognises that performers’ actions are informed and conditioned by their own “habitus”, as a complex internalised structuring system of personal histories, habits and

learned behaviours. The habitus also serves as a body of knowledge which plays a role in the motivation of the performer's particular reactions in a given role and choreography.

The training is therefore viewed as a complex set of learned behaviours that are a constituent of the dancer's habitus. The dancers in this study also belong within the trend of the "transnationality" of ballet culture, and their training is understood as a complex process of long duration. Since the training background of each dancer is an individual combination of school and company influences, an aspect of a particular dancer's education will be commented upon when it clearly emerges as an important and relevant aspect of an individual performance in a leotard role. The complex training of each dancer will not be discussed in a systematic way, but it is understood that both ballet school training and continued learning in the company informs this research. The choreographic training strategies in resident companies, as well as internal and external coaching in repertory companies, are explained as elements that the dancer internalises or rejects (which in turn affects their ever-changing habitus). Various repetiteurs do not only play the role of technical and stylistic teachers, but function as cultural translators between the choreographer's company practices and the repertory company's culture. The issues of training seem inseparable from the circumstances of the performer's culture. All four companies examined in this study have distinct traditions and organisational models. The study is conducted with an awareness of how their major differences (rehearsal periods, strategies and needs) may influence the dancer's performance.

Each component discussed in this chapter (the school training background, the company

training, or the influence of the company culture) is particularly emphasised in the upcoming case studies when it emerges as a clear influence (or a combination of influences) in the particular performance of a leotard role. The dancers in their interviews were asked about their training background from the school and ballet company, and about aspects of their company cultures (see Appendix 1).

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 3:

<sup>1</sup> “Habitus” originates from the Classical Greek concept of “hexis” (that referred to possession) introduced by Aristotle, and in the modern era it was reintroduced in the theories by French sociologist Marcel Mauss and phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, to explain “the practical embodied bases of action” (Lizardo, 2012, 1). As Lizardo explains, the concept was developed in Bourdieu’s theories in the most systematic way.

<sup>2</sup> The improvisation is taught by former Ballett Frankfurt and Nederlands Dans Theater performer, Shaun Amyot.

<sup>3</sup> Dowd training constitutes a “critical component of the NBS program,” and was introduced during 1990s under the directorship of Mavis Staines. (See “NBS Through the Decades,” Canada’s National Ballet School Online Presentation, accessed at: <http://www.nbs-enb.ca/about/default.aspx>)

<sup>4</sup> *The Royal Ballet Live* on 22 March 2012 included live internet broadcasting, opening its studios and behind-the-scenes process as a full-day open web-cast, showing the company’s daily training and rehearsals. (For the play back of the event see *The Guardian*, 22 March 2012, accessed at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/interactive/2012/mar/23/royal-ballet-live-stream?fb=native>)

<sup>5</sup> As explained by Johnson, during the early 1990s Forsythe often worked with Heidi Gilpin, the company resident researcher and dramaturge at the time, assembling a collection of “written and graphic texts” (that related to philosophy, mythology, science, architecture, cultural studies and other), which were then bound in a form of “conceptual notebook” distributed to the dancers as resources for exploration. While the performer receives a map, it is her/his role to discover possible individual pathways (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008). How this might have developed could be observed on the interactive maps in *The Loss Project* (Preston-Dunlop, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> One of the rare cases is Dresden Semper Oper Ballett’s Aaron Watkin, who as a former dancer of the Ballett Frankfurt may act as an internal Forsythe expert. Nevertheless, as dancer Ana Presta explains, the company still works with Forsythe and his external staging experts to revive specific ballets (Presta, interview, 25 June 2011).

<sup>7</sup> The complex historical interpretations of the concept of “culture”, from Enlightenment until today, are discussed in detail by cultural anthropologist Marvin Harris (2001). Harris extracts a common denominator of main historical definitions of “culture” as the “behaviour patterns associated with particular groups of peoples, that is to ‘customs,’ or to a people’s ‘way of life’” (2001, 16). While understanding that the term “culture” may refer to much more than a particular dancer as part of the company’s operational and social structural system (some concepts of culture also integrate biological and genetic properties of people), for the purpose of this study, “culture” is used in reference to Spradley’s dynamic social concept, which positions “culture” as “the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behaviour” (Spradley, 1979, 5).

<sup>8</sup> As one example, a mixed programme in 2001 juxtaposed austere post-modern, pedestrian choreography *The Comforts of Solitude* (2011) by Jean-Pierre Perrault and Ashton’s neoclassical and airy ballet *The Dream* (1964).

<sup>9</sup> This well-known incident ultimately led the choreographer to renegotiate the original contract and to propose alternative programming. Instead of Forsythe's longer ballet, the Royal Ballet got an original shorter work (*Firsttext*, co-choreographed by Forsythe, Caspersen and Anthony Rizzi), and an existing ballet (*Steptext*, 1985) Mackrell (1995, 12) quotes Forsythe's 1995 letter to the company stating his reasons for the cancellation of the commission. As one of the key reasons for his withdrawal of the commission Forsythe cited the unpreparedness of the Royal Ballet dancers to work in an "intensely collaborative working process" where the performers readily "generate movement themselves".

<sup>10</sup> As explained by Johnson and Lamy, two dancers (Lamy and Caroline Richardson) from the National Ballet of Canada were invited by Forsythe to teach *the second detail* to the members of his resident company in Frankfurt, when he was reshaping the work to fit the Ballett Frankfurt repertory (interviews, Johnson, 30 December 2008, and Lamy, 15 April 2011).

## CHAPTER 4

### DANCERS IN BALANCHINE’S BLACK AND WHITE BALLETS:

#### *THE FOUR TEMPERAMENTS* (1946) AND *AGON* (1957)

#### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in 1.4, Balanchine’s practice-clothes works are paradigmatic of the leotard ballet sub-genre. About fifteen of his choreographies may be considered representative of the “black-and-white” aesthetic.<sup>1</sup> The roles for soloists from two of these ballets are the subject of the analysis in this chapter: *The Four Temperaments*, as one of the earliest practice clothes works, which set the parameters of the genre and *Agon*, Balanchine’s iconic ballet representing a choreographic visualisation of Stravinsky’s twelve-note musical score.

BALANCHINE’S BALLET	ROLES	DANCERS
<i>The Four Temperaments</i> (1951 version)	“Melancholic”	Bart Cook (NYCB); Zdenek Konvalina (NBOC) Additional viewing: Keiichi Hirano (NBOC); Viacheslav Samodurov (RB)
	“Sanguinic” (Female role only)	Merrill Ashley (NYCB); Wendy Whelan/Maria Tallchief (NYCB); Sonia Rodriguez (NBOC) Additional viewing: Heather Ogden (NBOC); Darcey Bussell (RB)
<i>Agon</i> (1957)	“Bransle Gay”	Violette Verdy (NYCB); Maria Calegari (NYCB); Wendy Whelan (NYCB); Deborah Bull (RB); Mara Galeazzi (RB)

Fig. 4.0 Analysed roles and dancers

As fig. 4.0 shows, the dancers’ approaches in *The Four Temperaments* are analysed by focusing on two different roles: the male solo “Melancholic” and the female role from the

“Sanguinic” variation. The analysis of *Agon* particularly centres on different interpretations of the female solo “Bransle Gay” (in “Second Pas de trois”).

The research findings about the aesthetics of leotard ballets set out in section 1.4 are highly applicable to these two works. The contrasting achromatic costumes add a sense of geometric visual play. In his reductionist vision, Balanchine completely omits all stage props and scenery, except for the feature of a coloured cyclorama. The lighting is very often the only production design credit in these works. The sense of bare space, or the absence of design elements, may affect the performer’s approach to movement. It may, for example, amplify the relationship with music, or accentuate the awareness and phenomenal experience of movement in body-revealing costumes. The “undesigned”, or rather concealed design of costumes may be seen as a reference to the dancers’ attire in the ballet classroom and rehearsals. This aspect also may be of importance for the dancer’s thinking, feeling and way of moving in the dance.

While at once rejecting the “abstract” label, Balanchine emphasised his preference that the dancers and spectators avoid contemplating meaning behind the movement, suggesting that the “movement must be self-explanatory”. “If it isn’t, it has failed,” Balanchine declared around the same time as he was stripping *The Four Temperaments* into a practice-clothes version:

I see the basic elements of the dance in its aesthetic manifestations, that is, in the beauty of movement, in the unfolding of rhythmical patterns, and not in their possible meaning or interpretation; I am less interested in the portrait of any real character than in the choreographic idea behind the dance action. Thus the importance of the story itself becomes reduced to being the frame for the picture I want to paint (Balanchine, 1992/1951, 40).

For the analysis of Balanchine's dances, it is important to consider his musical explorations. The choreographer emphasised, "[W]hether a ballet has a story or not, the controlling image for me comes from the music" (Balanchine, 1992/1951, 42). Balanchine's methods of musical visualisation are explained in depth in Jordan's studies (for example, 1994, 2000 and 2002). The choreographer's musical motivation was integrated with his interest in ballet as a style of movement, and both elements should be considered in combination with the way particular dancers inspired him. As the choreographer explained, his "imagination" was "guided by the human material" — by the dancers' personalities (Balanchine, 1992/1951, 41).

As established in Chapter 1, many of Balanchine's ballets, viewed as dance texts, are flexible in a certain measure. The choreographer often revised some parts of his works or modified particular steps to accommodate the movement affinities of different dancers. This does not mean, however, that he was too liberal. As Ashley explains, Balanchine had an open attitude about some steps in his choreography, but was very firm about others. Thus the ballets preserved their identity even while being slightly customised for different casts (Ashley, interview, 29 October 2011). Sometimes changes were initiated by the dancer. As Ashley illustrates, she modified one step in "Sanguinic" (a gargouillade in the woman's second brief solo), because landing from the jump as choreographed felt very uncomfortable. Balanchine did not object to this change. But, as Cook explains, Balanchine also set clear limits. While the performer felt encouraged to give his own interpretation, he also knew immediately when he crossed the line. At one time, for instance, Cook felt empowered by Balanchine's reaction and decided to increase his dramatic expression: "I thought that was a *carte blanche*. And suddenly I was doing all sorts of stuff, but then he stopped me" (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011). For the



present analysis it was important to understand where this fine line may have been drawn in different roles, as this information may indicate the scope of the dancers' contribution in Balanchine's works. It also explains the performer's individual perceptions of freedom (or lack thereof) in the roles under study. Equally, the fluidity of dance texts is kept in mind, and changes made to steps were clarified with staging experts and dancers so that they are not mistaken for signs of the performer's idea.

The analysis in this chapter draws upon the background information about the ballets found in the sources written from a scholarly (spectators') perspective. Most notably, Jordan, 1994, 2000, 2002 and 2007; Joseph, 2002; Stilwell, 1994; and Escoffier, 2000, examine the intrinsic elements of one, or both ballets. Some of these sources explore the structural relationships between Balanchine's movement and music in great depth. In addition, journalistic accounts and interviews with dancers, as anecdotal recollections about the process and performances of these roles, have all provided important background knowledge, as did my previous research of Balanchine dancers' contributions (Tomic-Vajagic 2005, discussed in section 2.3).

With regard to performance records, it is important to clarify that *Agon* is analysed in this chapter solely on the basis of filmed sources, while for *The Four Temperaments* I was able to conduct fieldwork with the National Ballet of Canada (2009), observing rehearsals, live performances (with three different casts) and various elements of the staging process. As explained in 2.6 and 2.8, the dancers' performances are examined by using selected movement concepts from Laban's theory (*effort, shape, kinesphere*) and also analysed in process through *Motif writing*. My analysis from the spectator's perspective was juxtaposed with the information obtained during conversations with the performers who

were analysed in the films. While not all analysed dancers were available for the interviews, the case study presents a range of performers from both types of company cultures and diverse training backgrounds, demonstrating various conceptual approaches in Balanchine's leotard ballets.

#### 4.1 A PRACTICE CLOTHES VERSION (1951) OF *THE FOUR TEMPERAMENTS* (1946)

The 1951 version of the *Four Temperaments* (1946)<sup>2</sup> is an example of an unembellished practice-clothes ballet that inspires narrative allusions. Among the main reasons for this are the titles of the ballet and of its four core variations, which refer to the medieval archetypal personalities "Melancholic", "Sanguinic", "Phlegmatic" and "Choleric". For example, theorist Jeffrey Escoffier (2000) finds connections between the ballet and the French modernist cinema genre *film noir*, and Acocella compares the four "humours" to the "symbols of deep mysteries of the mind" that reveal "how emotion relates to thought, will and action" (1987, 16). There are also spectators who have read this work as "pure dance". Writer Allen Robertson, for instance, described the ballet as an "exploration of human geometry" and "one of the most humane abstractions" in the western contemporary art (2002/2003, 22).

As is well documented (for example, in Taper, 1984, 208), *Theme and Four Variations (According to the Four Temperaments) for String Orchestra and Piano* (1940) by modernist composer Paul Hindemith was Balanchine's first personal musical commission. In his choreographic idea, Balanchine follows Hindemith in developing a theme-and-variations structure in his choreography. As Denby explained, the major movement themes are immediately established in the three opening duets or "Themes" (1998/1946, 415). The

ballet then develops with the four variations (three solos and one duet: “Sanguinic”), in which the familiar patterns from “Themes” re-emerge in new permutations. Each of the variations, or “temperaments”, features the main dancer or dancers who in due time in one way or another interact with several demi-soloists.

As for the narrative (or perhaps metaphoric) allusions of the titles, the choreographer claimed that the sections of the work simply referred to the musical score. Hindemith replaced traditional musical terminology with the names of the medieval temperaments, annotating musical tempi in an alternative manner:

He [Hindemith] himself named the variations. He invented themes, made variations, and called them “the four temperaments.” “The four temperaments” is a gothic thing; instead of writing in Italian or German — “allegro,” “presto,” “schnell” (fast) — he wrote a temperament — not that somebody’s good or bad, but a temperament as applied to music (Balanchine, cited in Reynolds, 1999, 161).

In the previous chapter (3.4) it was established that Balanchine did not favour verbal explications with his dancers in the studio. While we do not know whether he shared this explanation of “the temperaments” as musical tempi, in the literature published thus far, none of the dancers mention this concept. Goldner records an early anecdote from the studio, when Balanchine’s direction rather seemed ambiguous and quite open to interpretation:

A dancer in the first production [of *Four Temperaments*] remembers Balanchine asking the cast if they knew what they were supposed to be. Worms? Bugs?, one of them pondered. No, Balanchine declared, then added rather grandly, “You are temperaments.” But that’s as far as the explication went (Goldner, 2008, 42-43).

According to Ashley and Cook, who performed the work much later (in the 1970s), at that time the choreographer did not speak very much in the studio about this ballet’s meaning, and in general did not give many verbal explications about the roles in the ballet at all. As

will be observed in the following sections, the dancers found their own ways to read his non-verbal directions and the choreography itself, as well as the Balanchine/Hindemith terminology, by developing their own ideas about the dichotomy between the metaphoric and even narrative allusions and abstraction in this ballet. With five major soloist roles, this work represents a rich terrain for an investigation of the performing approaches. The analysis focuses on two perhaps contrasting examples: the male solo “Melancholic” that may seem to include references to a kind of a narrative, and the female role in “Sanguinic” that seems to include very few allusions to characters or stories.

While this investigation centres on the analysis of the performances and not of the dance text itself, it is useful to note that, as with many other Balanchine’s ballets, the history of *The Four Temperaments* includes the choreographer’s “frequent small alterations” (The George Balanchine Foundation, 2007, online).<sup>3</sup> The analysis of the examples was done in consideration of this issue, and therefore comparable versions where the steps remained consistent were used. *The Four Temperaments* is performed by many dancers internationally and was one of Balanchine’s black-and-white ballets that was quickly integrated into the programming of many repertory companies.<sup>4</sup> The National Ballet of Canada premiered it in 1968 and has since performed it many times, most recently in 2006 and 2009 (staged and rehearsed by two former New York City Ballet dancers, Sidimus and Fischer). In the Royal Ballet, *The Four Temperaments* premiered in 1973, but after several years it was taken off the regular repertoire (see Meisner, 2004, 27). It was revived in 2003 by Nanette Glushak, and the most recent staging was in 2006 (its recording is used in this analysis).

#### 4.2 “MELANCHOLIC”

Due to its combination of elements that create a bleak atmosphere, “Melancholic” — the first among the variations, may be perceived as one of the practice-clothes ballet sections that projects strong programmatic allusions. Although Balanchine may not have wanted this effect, the variation may be read as a story that has a clear dramatic evolution (a sense of beginning, middle and end, or elements which Altman, 2008, 6, relates to the structuralist narrative, as discussed in 1.1). After three brightly lit “Themes”, “Melancholic” starts with the stage dimmed and a lone dancer entering disoriented. He seems introverted, perhaps even desperate. During the course of the variation, this man encounters several women who seem to affect his mood greatly, ruffling his introspective state.

The music tempo in “Melancholic” is slow and it may be perceived as ominous (as if anticipating some dramatic development). Balanchine structures the dance in three, nearly seamless, yet very clear, sub-sections. Distinct parts of the solo signify musical changes:

1. adage — the solo;
2. allegro — the soloist’s interaction with two female dancers;
3. musical crescendo/culmination: the “Melancholic” finale — the male soloist is with six women (choreographically beginning with a synchronous march of four female dancers).

A gloomy atmosphere persists throughout the man's opening solo dance (piano and violin adage, sub-section 1). In this sub-section the man moves laterally, on diagonals and in circular pathways. His multifocal spatial patterns exude disorientation. As Croce observed, "the solo dancer does not seem to know how much room he has" (2000/1971, 1951). As the tempo begins to change and Hindemith introduces vibrant violins that speed up nervously (distinguishing the allegro sub-section, 2), the man is joined by two demi-soloists who appear to interrupt him. This middle part of the variation is a highly-strung dance. The apprehension between the three performers is reminiscent of the tension between identical magnetic poles, all gravitating toward the centre yet unable to approach each other. The final sub-section (3) begins after another dramatic musical shift. In the culmination, the string orchestra is intercepted by strong, staccato piano chords. Choreographically, this music is visualised as the march of four women entering the scene with antagonistic grands battements, which may be seen as another intimidation of the man, who is lured to join them, yet struggles not to capitulate. He jumps and runs, but ultimately crumbles. When all the women finally leave, he seems even more desolate and exits alone, retreating backwards in a deep backbend, as if his body is broken in two.

Beyond reading any thematic imagery in the choreography, the movement material is interesting in itself. From the beginning, the choreography explores the theme of morphing upward and downward movements, perhaps as a response to a convergence between two solo musical instruments. The "Melancholic" variation also presents a strong contrast in the *body attitudes* of the soloist and his female counterparts: the man is slouched, bent, unsettled, and often slow, while the women are quick, direct, expressly vertical and towering. As Escoffier observes, the man's "torso is never once held stiff and upright in the classical manner", a posture which is accentuated by the surrounding female soloists who

dance by “stabbing the stage with their pointed shoes” (2000, 45). In Laban terms, the man’s body often works as two units, with the highly mobile torso engaged in a range of shifts of axis. (There are deep forward and backward bends, and a corkscrew action of the upper body where his hips are solidly grounded, but the thoracic area twists, as the man wraps his arms around himself.) Overall, several key movement themes stand out:

- *indirectness* and *sustained* movements, leading to the multifocal and tentative relationship to the space (especially while “Melancholic” is on his own in sub-section 1, and in sub-section 3, during the exit);
- *light touch*, combined with a strong sense of the gravity pull (relevés followed by crouches and falls; jumps that seem weighty, often strained and low in elevation; very deep cambrés and penchés);
- increased dynamic contrasts during interactions with other dancers (in sub-sections 2 and 3): *sudden* shifts, switching between *indirect* and *direct*, upward and downward, *lightness* and *strength*.

The analysis uses several performance records from three companies (fig. 4.1). Out of four dancers, two were interviewed (Cook and Zdenek Konvalina), and their recordings are the main focus of this section. The remaining two performances, by repertory-company dancers Viacheslav Samodurov and Keiichi Hirano, are analysed and used as useful additional comparative information. Finally, the role is discussed in an interview with the National Ballet of Canada’s previous “Melancholic” Aleksandar Antonijevic, who discussed the solo in comparison with his new, 2009 roles (“Phlegmatic” and the male role “Sanguinic”). Since there is no recording of his performance and Antonijevic was observed

on one occasion in live performance in 2006, his views informed the analysis but are only used to illustrate specific details.

COMPANY	DANCER	INTERVIEW	RECORDING
New York City Ballet	Bart Cook	Telephone interview, 9 December 2011	Ardolino and Brockway (1977)
The National Ballet of Canada (staging Joysanne Sidimus)	Zdenek Konvalina	Personal interview, 23 October 2009	The National Ballet of Canada (2009a/2009b)
The National Ballet of Canada (staging Joysanne Sidimus)	Keiichi Hirano	n/a	The National Ballet of Canada (2009a/2009b)
The Royal Ballet (staging Nanette Glushak)	Viacheslav Samodurov	n/a	The Royal Ballet (2006b)

Fig. 4.1 Dancers in the “Melancholic” variation<sup>5</sup>

To explain the differences between the dancers’ approaches, an interesting dance phrase that represents choreographic elucidation of the piano-violin interplay (sub-section 1), is particularly illustrative. The disorientation of the “Melancholic”, a sense of collapsing and internal focus, all are well represented here. The phrase occurs in the middle of the man’s opening solo, when the high-pitched violin cry takes over the space. Cook denotes the phrase as the “piqué, arabesque, fouetté, fall on the ground” (interview, 9 December 2011).

This “falling phrase” (fig. 4.2) is repeated three times. It begins with the man lingering in a suspenseful (perhaps hopeful) relevé in an arabesque on an elongated violin note. His arms are high in the air. Suddenly, his body twists and he loses balance, diving backwards. The soloist somehow manages to tilt in the air and land on his side, and then quickly turns over into a forward lunge from which he pushes himself back into standing (and then repeats the



phrase twice more). Siegel describes this suspenseful scene as watching a person “on a tightrope”:

A piano and violin are having a dialogue, not an entirely amicable one. The man takes a few teetering steps, then lunges his torso backward with his arms stretched out behind his head as if to gain his balance. He seems to be grasping for huge amounts of space but unable to control it. In a gesture both self-directed and steadying, he rises to half-toe and wraps his arms around his body. He takes another diagonal path, tilts over, falls sideways with his body straight, and just gets his hands under himself in time to keep from slamming into the ground (Siegel, 1985, 215).

Although we do not know which dancer is being described in Siegel’s passage, in any performance the effect is inevitably dramatic, as it represents the tension between reaching upward (perhaps as a metaphor for a desire to remain in control) and giving up.

Most dancers perform the “falling phrase” by using the same timing and the same combination of *efforts* across all three falls. For example, Hirano and Samodurov both seem aloof while lingering and looking upward. Each of their touch-downs seems controlled and the pressure onto the floor is not forceful. (In Laban terms, their falls are *light*, *indirect* and *bound*.) Balanchine dancer Cook also performs each repetition with a sense of suspension and command (fig. 4.2). He greatly emphasises staying upright, lingering in the beginning of the phrase, and even seeming to maintain his composure while falling sideways. His movement accelerates when rolling-over into the lunge, but the contrast in the dynamics (between the *sustained*-falling and *sudden*-rolling) is not sharp. Each forward lunge is not very deep. As a result, Cook does not appear to give in to gravity. This “Melancholic” therefore seems withdrawn and guarded, but not desperate. The “falling phrase” is calm; the man never fully gives in or lets go. If Cook indeed envisioned a story, his “drama” is subtle, accenting a prolonged rise to a violin note,

perhaps conveying to the viewer that he is not wanting to fall. But once he does plunge, we are not afraid for him — this “Melancholic” still seems to manage his destiny.

In comparison, the performance by Konvalina has much stronger contrasts and variations in the movement dynamics. The sense of “drama” is thus amplified. Of all the four dancers, Konvalina stands out as the “Melancholic” with the least control (fig. 4.2). The falling and the rolling-over movements do not seem to come to the man by choice so much as necessity, as if getting out of uncomfortable situations. Before the first fall, for instance, Konvalina holds himself upward, balancing steadily. His stability is convincing, which makes his subsequent tumble unexpected. The dive, although slow and oblique, seems to result from a well-hidden physical tension. His tilt in the fouetté is also more sudden than Cook’s, and the rolling movement is agile. Konvalina’s approach is reminiscent of a backward-falling cat who can swiftly roll over to regain balance, with suppleness yet energetically. This approach is not only unforeseen, but it also induces the viewer’s movement empathy as there is a great sense of vulnerability and urgency in the man’s shift in dynamics.

Konvalina’s repeated fall, however, is different (fig.4.2). He does not wait as long up on his half-toe — this second time the rearward dive is accelerated, which increases the impression of a free fall. The turn-over into the lunge is still quick, but is also heavier, as if in frustration; the man tried again, yet again failed to control his body. This lunge is also deeper and Konvalina pauses for a very brief moment with his chest and forehead nearly touching the floor before he rises onto his feet. Even if the spectator is not interested in reading a narrative into this movement, it is there: the movement reads as disappointment.

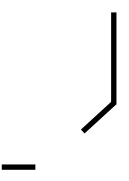
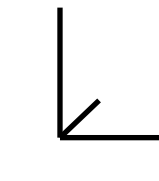
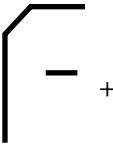
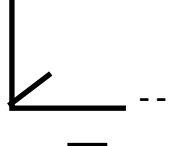
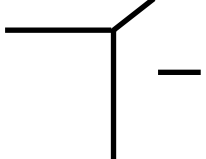
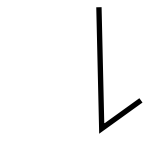
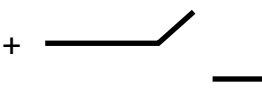
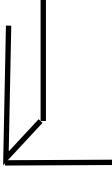
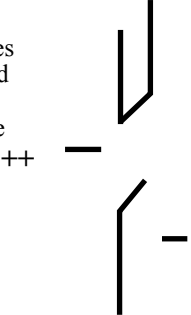
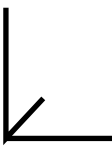

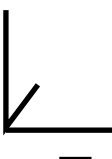
THE FALLING PHRASE - THREE REPETITIONS	KONVALINA	COOK
1st Fall		
1a. Falling on his back	 <i>Sustained and indirect</i>	 <i>Light, sustained, bound</i>
1b. Rolling over	 <i>Strong, quick, direct (punch)</i>	 <i>Light, bound (quickness de-emphasised)</i>
2nd Fall		
2a. Rises, steps, développé, initiates second fall	 <i>Acceleration: Strong, quick, free</i>	 <i>Light, slowness emphasised</i>
2b. Rolling over	 <i>Free and quick</i>	 <i>Light, bound, indirect</i>
3rd Fall		
3a. The final fall	<p>(3.a) A great contrast between qualities in getting up and falling down (shown from the bottom up)</p>  <i>++</i>	 <i>Light, slowness emphasised, bound</i>
3b. Final rolling over	<p>(3.b) sharpest turn, sudden, direct</p>  <i>++</i>	 <i>Light, quick, bound</i>

Fig. 4.2 “Melancholic” the “falling phrase”: Cook and Konvalina

The final fall is different again — there is a long lingering in the relevé, but now the man seems more remote, spatially inexplicit (as if tired and resigned), first reaching upwards and then letting go and plummeting uncontrollably and with great heaviness. This final fall signals a person at the edge of his physical and psychological control. Unlike Cook, who seems to maintain his calm while on the ground, Konvalina's rolling movement signals to the viewer a feeling of defeat and desperation, and we may wonder how many lives the man has left.

While short, the “falling” phrase illustrates well how different dancers' approaches can paint the variation with a different palette of colours. As fig. 4.2 indicates, Cook's approach is the more even-handed of the two. All his falls are performed with a similar combination of qualities and with more restraint in the contrasts of dynamics. Konvalina's diverse articulation reduces the impact of the repetition and adds variety. His highly contrasting dynamics create an impression of a developing inner drama. Whether Balanchine would think that Konvalina's approach goes too far cannot be ascertained, but his movement interpretation is convincing. Konvalina does not use facial expressions — dramatic effects come out as an extension of the variations in his postural movement execution. It should also be clarified that Konvalina performed the phrase in this same manner in different performances. (With one rehearsal observation, two live performances and two films, this dancer was observed in more situations than others in this analysis.)

His training is not seen as a major influence, as Konvalina's ballet school background (Vaganova style) is very similar not only to that of Samodurov, but also to that of Antonijevic, whose performing style in the role did not include high dynamic contrasts and is not remembered for strong projections of metaphoric or narrative symbolism. The

influence of staging does not appear as a dominant factor either. Hirano — the other dancer in the Canadian 2009 cast who worked with the same stager, Sidimus, showed a very different articulation of this phrase. (Equally, in the rehearsals that I attended, Sidimus did not comment upon or correct either dancer's version of the phrase.)

Konvalina's approach thus seems to be an individualistic interpretation, perhaps a reflection of the dancer's idea about an imagined narrative, or of a particular reading of the music. Musically, Konvalina's approach seems to direct the viewer toward the dialogue between the two instruments, as his varied accents of movement shift our focus between one and the other. In the interview, the dancer did emphasise the importance of understanding the music, but he did not give many details about it. The score, he thought, was very complex and its perceived simplicity is treacherous. "Hindemith seems obvious but it's not – it's a difficult music. So I want to know about that in detail" (Konvalina, interview, 23 October 2009). While in the interview Konvalina did not mention the "falling phrase" specifically, he did however underscore the great importance of high contrasts throughout the solo. He explained the need to draw out differences between weighty, yet powerful jumps ("out of frustration") and the sense of being pulled down to the floor all the time. Konvalina's imagery involved "energy", required to build up tension from the inside, and the dance as an interpretation of the particular "melancholic mood" which, in this case, builds up as a "quiet scream":

Melancholic can be also really upset and very jittery... But I think this one [Balanchine's "Melancholic"] is more about the "quiet scream" and it's building from inside out. So by the time it all comes out, there is a lot of pushing, and pushing out, but it's not like, "Go!" — as in the other variations, or moods (Konvalina, interview, 23 October 2009).

The sense of strain building within was one of the aspects of his performance that stood out when I analysed his dance. As the dancer explained, in addition to knowing the music very well, his preparation for the role had not focused on the conception of a character but on the strength training. “In some ways I think I should rehearse more for the stamina,” he said, emphasising that the training of quadriceps is especially important because of the falls. This type of physical training for Konvalina related to the feeling of being “in control” and being ready to be more intuitive in on-stage performance. As the dancer explains, his reading of a very specific interpretation of melancholic “mood” developed over a longer period, as his approach changed following earlier performances of the role.

It seems like each time I come to the role and every time I’m older I have a different way of approaching and understanding it... I feel like now, several years later, it is more important for me to express the mood, rather than show the technique. I feel that that is more interesting, even for me while I am dancing. I can jump, I can do technical parts, but feel like even more I can express the melancholy within that dance (Konvalina, interview, 23 October 2009).

As observed in the movement analysis, rather than acting through facial expressions and added theatricality, his conceptual approach is embedded and discernible in his movement.

In comparison, Cook’s phrasing, as described earlier, emphasises long, drawn-out falling and his timing musically focuses our attention on the prolonged high violin notes. When he is on the ground and in the rolling-over movement he picks up piano tones, yet as already established, the contrast is not as sharp as in Konvalina’s approach. As Cook recalls, long lingering was part of Balanchine’s direction. Balanchine asked the dancer to “stay up as long” as he could before the fall, and to “have the angle [in the fall] as apparent as it could be before you hit the ground” (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011). A rare image that Balanchine gave was one of disintegrating “like smoke”, keeping in mind that the dancer needs to keep his body like “a plank, flat”.

After you do the piqué arabesque on balance, the fouetté to the front throws you back and he wanted you to leave your leg in the front as long as you dared (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).

This is interesting as it probably implies Balanchine's emphasis of the violin sound and the airiness of the fall (like "smoke"), but it also suggests that the falling action should include some tension (the body angle has to be emphasised and the body remain "flat").

You fall with your foot out and with your two hands up without bending in your hips... He [Balanchine] was also very specific about the dynamics — going very slow, from one side to the other, and then doing a very quick agitated roll into the lunge to the other side... He was very specific about the movement contrast: *Sloow-fast! Slooow-fast! Sloooow-fast!* (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011)

Cook certainly seems to reflect this "smoke" imagery, lingering very long in each arabesque, and falling slowly and with *lightness*. Neither the contrasts between *slow* and *fast*, however, nor those between high and low movements, are too sharp. In the "falling phrase" Cook's diminished contrast while switching from falling to rolling over further emphasised the initial part of the phrase (the "falling" action where his accent is on the elongation of movement). In the interview, Cook explained that his personal reading of the "falling phrase" is that of another representation of the "theme and variations" concept, that is used by Balanchine in the form of the ballet. The "falling phrase", Cook underlines, should be seen as an elaboration of "the tombé" — one of the major movement motifs in the ballet overall. There is a tombé "in every different manner" in the ballet, "and I certainly fall down there — piqué, arabesque, fouetté, fall on the ground" (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).

It is interesting to observe in this example how Cook blended the choreographer's directions with his own conceptual understanding of the dance. The dancer's own interpretation emerged from the integration of these aspects. A similar fusion can be seen

between the choreographer's directions and the dancer's own ideas in Cook's approach in other parts of the "Melancholic" variation. For example, throughout the dance, Cook's particular stylistic contribution takes the form of extremely deep backbends that are more flexible than those in any of the other renditions by the other dancers analysed. Cook explained that Balanchine consented to this approach: "He saw that I could bend, and he gave me permission without words to go as far as I could. Which was farther probably than anyone had ever gone" (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).

Cook uses his high spinal flexibility not only in bending accents but also in a recurring movement of swiftly wrapping the arms around the body, which he interprets with extreme plasticity and forcefulness. He over-reaches in the spiralling action, twisting the torso in a corkscrew-like motion. The dancer later added his own interpretation of these movements — the deep *cambrés*, he argued, reflected the metaphor of "melting down". (Cook's phrase may be seen as an extension or variation of Balanchine's imagery of "smoke" and "disintegration" as mentioned previously.) The corkscrew action related to the image of "self-flagellation", which Cook saw as another very important theme in the solo:

The idea about exploring these humours, or emotions... the ancient alchemical stuff, or the names they [Hindemith and Balanchine] chose to use... you can see it in the movements. "Sanguinic" is just round and warm, and kind of daring. And of course the "Melancholic" has self-flagellation in it, and the melting down and being compressed. It's kind of in the music as well (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).

In this sense, an individual reading that begins with the choreographer's direction re-emerges. Cook's conceptualisation that involves interpreting the mood of the music and movements as metaphoric images thus combines the choreographer's directions and his own understanding of the choreographic material. When he conveys his ideas about the imagery, such as "melting down", Cook explains that it may be seen in the dance: "you can



see it in the movements” (interview, 9 December 2011). Whether Balanchine intended the movement to be read in such way is not certain.

Cook’s conceptual reading also implied the linear development of a kind of dramatic narrative. When he spoke about the female dancers in the variation, Cook’s description was suggestive of a succession of unfolding events:

It’s obvious that the two girls who come out are the barriers that he is weighing through, it is almost as if they are reeds in his way... And then at the end, the whole corps becomes an obstacle. They are kicking at him... with pointed feet and legs (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).

However, as with the “falling phrase” there is some discrepancy between Cook’s idea and his expression in performance. Although his concept includes the sense of a dramatic episode (a struggle), Cook’s interpretation as seen in the dance is not as dramatic as his verbal reading of the story implies. In particular, in Cook’s performance the interactions with the women in sub-section 2 appear to be more carefree than he describes them to be. Overall, Cook’s “Melancholic” appears to be fairly buoyant and not so gloomy as seen in the other dancers’ interpretations. It is only in the final part of the variation (sub-section 3) when his deep backbends evoke exhaustion and the man seems at his wit’s end that Cook projects a strong sense of drama. Discussing this part of the variation, Cook explained a story that he again reads partly from the movement, and partly from Balanchine’s reticent, but definitive directions. In the variation finale, there is a feeling of the man’s demise — “He jumps in the air and collapses on a crescendo”.

He is on the ground on the end of the phrase. He [Balanchine] was very specific about that. My instinct, and I couldn’t even make my body not do it, was to finish on that loud crash to be up and fall in the silence... But, that’s not the choreography [that Balanchine wanted]. Down on the big note! Well, what does that mean? Of course that means being thrown down. And literally he

[Balanchine] wanted you to trip over your leg (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).

There is no similar disparity in Konvalina's approach. Konvalina, who never worked with Balanchine directly, and was not restrained by the staging expert, clearly felt the freedom to establish his own reading and to express it through the movement. For instance, continuing with his tendency to underscore high movement contrasts, Konvalina emphasises the transition between sub-sections 1 (adage) and 2 (allegro). In this transition, the piano and the violin quieten, and the dancer crouches on the floor and curls into a ball. At the onset of the allegro violin music, two women come in. While other dancers do not look anywhere else but down, Konvalina sends a glance across the room, while turning around. Although the moment does not last long, Konvalina sends us a signal to expect something — his approach announces the onset of the jittery music (and thus the women's entrance).

In this sense, his manner of execution may again be read as a musical interpretation, or as an allusion to a narrative development. The two women might represent someone (or something) familiar to "Melancholic", as he knows that they may appear and awaits them. (In comparison, the Royal Ballet's Samodurov, in sub-section 2 still gives an impression of a multi-focal, ambiguous relationship with the space and the female dancers, and seems oblivious to the presence of the two women; he never looks at them. Cook, for example, bows down in a squat and remains passive, and notices the two women for the first time after he has risen from the crouch, by which time the nervous music is already playing and the women circle around him on whirlwind paths.)

In Konvalina's approach, therefore, the viewer is alerted and prepared for the musical change sooner — as sub-section 1 wraps up. As a result, the main shift occurs in this middle part of the dance, and the finale of the variation is a progression starting from this relatively early point. The dramatic arc is very different to those seen in the approaches of Cook or Samodurov, and the viewer's impression of the whole "Melancholic" choreography may be very different. It was interesting to learn that Konvalina's approach developed through a carefully thought-through reading. In his interview he explained that the relationship with two women was one of the key aspects to his approach in the whole variation.

"Melancholic"... is a solo in a way, but connected with two soloist girls (and then there are more to come). It is really like two different kinds of melancholic mood that I'm fighting. I feel like I want to know what they are doing, I don't want to just go on stage and do my part, regardless of their movement (Konvalina, interview, 23 October 2009).

Some important larger points emerge from the discussion above. Firstly, due to his strong dramatic interpretation of the finale, Cook's performance has a sense of high energy building up towards the end. Both performing approaches also influence the viewer to experience the music in different ways. Secondly, through detailed movement analysis it emerged that the dancers contributed by building distinctive relationships with the choreographic text. Cook (in both, his readings and performance of the "falling phrase" and of the variation's finale) seems to find a careful middle-ground between his own metaphoric ideas and Balanchine's directions. This approach included clear interpretation of specific imagery provided by the choreographer, such as "smoke", and the dancer's own sense of "melting", "self-flagellation" and "being thrown down".

Notably, we do not see all Cook's ideas about the dramatic events in his performance, but Balanchine had set the boundaries of the acceptable quite clearly, as explained in the

introduction of this chapter. (What seemed to be a “carte blanche” to Cook was clearly more limited, as explained on p.108.) Furthermore, the choreographer habitually did not say much in the process, and the dancer developed his observational skills to a high level in order to tread the fine line between what was and what was not approved of: “He just clapped his hands once, shook his head a little bit, and gave me the signal that that was too much. But it was after giving me the green light to go for it” (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011). This may explain the partial correlation between Cook’s verbally expressed ideas and qualities observed in his movement. It is conceivable that the dancer negotiated his own approach and reconciled this with the parameters set by the choreographer. While it is difficult to speculate from this single example, it may be that proximity to the choreographer made Cook more restrained and reluctant to use fully the metaphors and images in his performance.

In comparison, Konvalina read the choreography with less restraint, and clearly expressed his ideas through the movement. As his interview indicates, the dancer felt free to develop and change his ideas and to modify his approach to the role. He was not influenced by the choreographer’s direct requests or restricted by staging requirements to produce this particular approach. Consequently, this individual approach was obvious in the movement as well. Whether Balanchine would approve of every aspect of Konvalina’s role is not certain, but the accents, thoughtful ideas (building strength so that tension can emerge from within), and careful attention to the music produced an interesting and original point of view.

As can be seen from this single example, the solo variation as a short fragment of the whole work may reveal abundant information about the complex relationship between the

dancer's and the choreographer's processes in a leotard ballet. Distinctive approaches to details make us view the same movement material in very different ways. They also may shape the significant section of the whole work differently. In this case, both performers gave equally interesting readings of the same choreography and yet provided distinct musical and even narrative readings. They also revealed different manifestations of the dancer's contribution in a plotless ballet. Although in some degree conditioned by the choreographer's delineations, each dancer nevertheless developed an autonomous reading of the movement and choreography, and formulated his own interpretation which at least partially shaded the variation in an individual manner. Both dancers contributed with strong individual and distinctive effects in a leotard ballet, by making particular choices. These points will be revisited in Chapter 6.

#### 4.3 THE FEMALE ROLE IN "SANGUINIC"

Although Balanchine felt that the meaning of the "Melancholic" variation should only refer to the musical score, the analysis in the previous section showed that two dancers, in very different environments, found a range of imagery and even developed some narrative readings about the male character and his fate. In contrast, the "Sanguinic" variation that follows seems to inspire very few conceptual readings about the meaning behind the movement. This is perhaps ironic, as "Sanguinic" is the only duet among the four core dances, and Balanchine famously said that a man and a woman together on stage immediately allude to stories.<sup>6</sup>

As in all the other sections in the ballet, there are additional demi-soloists alongside the principal performers. In this case, these are four women. As a pas de deux, this section

represents a variation on the opening three duos (particular links may be found with the second, allegro opening “Theme”).<sup>7</sup> Upon closer inspection, the duet is evidently structured as a variation on the classical pas de deux form (although the opening here is not an adage, but an allegro dance). In terms of movement qualities, “Sanguinic”, following the bent-body “Melancholic”, represents a restoration of the full verticality of the principal couple. Balanchine nevertheless continues to play with the oppositions — this time, the female ensemble enters the stage with angularly stooped body posture.

In harmony with Balanchine’s attention to music, Hindemith’s score is a likely motivation for the inclusion of the duet form among the solo variations. The “Sanguinic” music opens with a particularly strong dialogue between the solo piano and the violins, and their interplay continues through the dance. The whole variation “Sanguinic” may be divided into three sub-sections:

1. the opening duet — establishing the dialogue between the piano and the violin;
2. three dance monologues (female—male—female) — violin crescendo and lively piano solo;
3. the coda — recapitulation (the string orchestra and the piano together): all dancers on stage performing a rhythmic phrase in unison.

The female soloist’s main qualities are:

- strong vertical body attitude and *sagittal* spatial emphasis (*directness* prominent);
- *quickness* in attack and in movement initiation; allegro dancing throughout (speed and acceleration of movement are accentuated, particularly in the first brief solo in sub-section 2);

- changing between middle-reach and very wide *kinesphere* (the second short female solo in sub-section 2, in particular, includes very far-reaching movements).

Although there are no major shifts of axis (as in “Melancholic”) and the balletic upright body attitude seems restored, Balanchine continues to disrupt verticality through frequent off-balance movements of the female soloist. As this section aims to illustrate, different dancers’ approaches either accentuate this off-balance or aim to stress a more perpendicular attitude. These approaches are well-illustrated in the performances of the opening duet (sub-section 1). Among the performances analysed (fig.4.3), the primary focus is on the differences of interpretation of two ballerinas who worked directly with Balanchine, Merrill Ashley and Maria Tallchief. Although both dancers worked within the choreographer’s directions, as will be discussed here, their performances of the “Sanguinic” role come across very differently.

COMPANY	FEMALE SOLO ROLE	INTERVIEW	PERFORMANCE RECORDING
New York City Ballet	Merrill Ashley	Skype conversation, 28 October 2011	Ardolino and Brockway (1977)
New York City Ballet	Maria Tallchief (coaching Wendy Whelan)	n/a	Reynolds and Brooks (1996)
National Ballet of Canada (staging Joysanne Sidimus)	Sonia Rodriguez	Personal interview, 2007 (published in Tomic-Vajagic, 2008)	Live performances: The National Ballet of Canada (2006) and November (2008)
National Ballet of Canada (staging Joysanne Sidimus)	Heather Ogden	Telephone interview, 22 April 2010	National Ballet of Canada (2009a and 2009b)
The Royal Ballet (staging Nanette Glushak)	Darcey Bussell	n/a	The Royal Ballet (2006b)

Fig. 4.3 Dancers in “Sanguinic”<sup>8</sup>

Ashley is the dancer singled out by Daly (1987) for displaying particular agency in another plotless ballet (*Symphony in C*), by defying the choreographer's gender construct (as discussed in 2.1). Tallchief is the original performer from the 1951 version.<sup>9</sup> Although she personally does not dance on the available film (nor was she interviewed), Tallchief demonstrates, speaks about the choreography in great detail, and shows her dancing approach through coaching directions and corrections. (A dancer from the post-Balanchine generation of the New York City Ballet, Wendy Whelan, performs the movement.) A performance of a National Ballet of Canada dancer, Sonia Rodriguez, was included as another interesting example. Two other dancers from repertory companies, Heather Ogden (from the Canadian version) and the Royal Ballet's Darcey Bussell, were used as additional sources. A conversation with Canadian ballerina Martine Lamy (whose film was not available) also informed the research.

From observation of the choreography in these stagings it is evident that the steps of "Sanguinic" are still consistent (although the performing style is more flexible) between the 1951 (Tallchief demonstration) and the more contemporary versions. From the opening chords, "Sanguinic" announces itself as a more lively world than the preceding "Melancholic". As Balanchine's former ballerina and staging expert Francina Russell noted, the dance "exudes strength and confidence" (cited in Flatow, 2010, 32). In movement analysis terms, these elements are recognisable through *vertical* and *sagittal spatial emphasis* and, although there are many diagonals as well as steps across the stage, the overall impression is that of a *direct* and frontal relationship with the viewer.

Although this variation does not imply a strong sense of a story, there is an impression of playfulness throughout. "Sanguinic" opens with a sense of symmetry between two



instruments in the music, and Balanchine responds sympathetically in the choreography: the man steps out on the stage (visualising the piano) and the woman responds (representing the violins). The two dancers approach each other teasingly, by starting and stopping on their path across the stage. As the violin melody develops, the couple unites in a synchronised dancing phrase, advancing jovially on a diagonal path travelling downstage left. This part of the variation (sub-section 1), in particular, is composed of a variety of small, virtuosic movements. As Siegel remarks, “[E]ach rhythmic embellishment seems to suggest some novel footwork to the dancers” (1985, 219). This choreographic approach is later echoed in the first female and male brief solos (in sub-section 2).

The performers continue to taunt each other through an exchange of ronds de jambe. This step is then amplified, Balanchine continuing the playful game of provocation: the woman kicks her legs high (six alternating grands développés in opposite directions), and her partner sticks his foot in front of hers each time, as if to childishly trip her up. The dance further develops on a diagonal path, following the musical melody. This melody is expressed by Balanchine as a turning phrase, composed of four whirling steps, each ending abruptly with a slight caesura. Upon the final turn, the pair quickly retreats, running backwards to their initial central spot. They are here to prepare for the musical melody to repeat. For the second onset of the same melody, Balanchine does not reprise the turning phrase, but the man and the woman step forward in unison and backward in a zig-zagging pattern, reminiscent of “the cakewalk” step.<sup>10</sup> This sub-section ends in the centre, as the melody is re-interpreted less literally, in a series of supported piqué-retiré turns.

This detailed description of the opening of “Sanguinic” serves to begin to illustrate the major distinctions in the respective approaches of Ashley and Tallchief. One of the greatest

overall differences is that in this sub-section (1) Ashley emphasises the off-balance approach more than Tallchief does. Ashley uses a large, transverse *kinesphere* and an increased sense of *free* movement that is initiated from the hips that are thrust, hinged and seemingly pulled in different directions. In Tallchief’s coaching session, however, the hip area is far more controlled. Whenever Whelan attempts to proceed in a similar unrestrained fashion, Tallchief corrects her, asking her to remain upright (not to slant the pelvic area) and to contain the hip initiation. As a result, the movement is performed with a more modest *kinesphere*, and firmly on-balance. Since both Tallchief and Ashley were coached by Balanchine directly, this element most likely reveals a shift in the choreographer’s approach over two decades, and marks an evolution in the aesthetic of the variation through time. But, with the example of Cook’s “Melancholic” in mind, it is also important here to investigate the extent to which the two approaches are part of the choreographer’s directions, and how much they reflect the individual dancers’ contributions to the choreography.

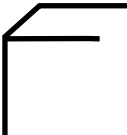

<p>Comparisons of overall movement qualities in “Sanguinic”</p>	<p>Wendy Whelan (in 1996) as coached by Maria Tallchief (performer of the 1951 role)</p>  <p><i>Strong, direct, bound (fighting side of the spectrum)</i></p>	<p>Merrill Ashley (1977)</p>  <p><i>Free and direct (combining fighting and indulging sides of the spectrum)</i></p>
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Fig. 4.4 Movement qualities of two Balanchine’s dancers in “Sanguinic”

In Laban's terms (fig. 4.4), Tallchief's overall approach emphasises the *fighting* side of the *effort* graph (*bound* movement, *direct* attitude toward personal and surrounding space, and *strong* force). In comparison, Ashley's approach crosses the two opposing sides of the spectrum (*direct*, *free*), combining the *fighting* with *indulging* movement qualities. Ashley's use of the torso, more liberal shifts of the hips, and frequent pelvic initiation of movement together amplify the sense of an unencumbered movement style. Even in steps where she is in unison with her partner, Ashley seems freer, or reaches slightly farther and wider (in terms of *kinsephere*) than her partner, Daniel Duell.

In sub-section 1, this approach can be observed particularly in her subtle agency in the diagonal "turning phrase" and in the "cakewalk step". For example, as established already, at the end of each turn, both dancers synchronously stop and briefly pause. Ashley is the only one, however, who allows a slight *free* lateral twist of her hips, adding a stronger punctuation of the piano note. With the exception of Rodriguez in the Canadian version, other women do not do this. Bussell, for instance, does not shift her hips, but flicks her wrists to mark the accent (the pause). Whelan performs the movement without any twist in the hips upon a caesura. Tallchief seems to consent to this approach: "[Y]ou just stop, simply stop" is her only direction (in Reynolds and Brooks, 1996).

At interview, I asked Ashley about her approach in the "turning phrase". She explained that the phrasing relates to her understanding of "the rhythm of the step" (interview, 28 October 2011). Demonstrating the details of her phrasing on camera, Ashley explained the phrase as a six-count unit, clarifying the rhythm by tapping. According to her interpretation, the key is the beginning of the phrase: "the plié in the fifth position before the little en tournant step". This plié should be held longer (for two counts, rather than one),<sup>11</sup> and the dancer

should not rush through it. The turn should start on the third count and, if the dancer starts turning sooner, Ashley explains, the dynamics of the whole step changes — the turn becomes slower (interview, 28 October 2011). Although she did not specifically address the “free” twist in the hips, Ashley’s approach is explained through her articulation of the step: with the longer plié, the dancer gains the impetus and the succeeding turn is faster. When the turn is accelerated, it is then more difficult to stop it on a piano note. Thus, the slight twist in the hips occurs reactively.

It is particularly interesting to note here that although an effect was observed in the movement analysis, its rationale was fully clarified only through Ashley’s verbal explanation. Moreover, although the effect was observed as a small detail in the movement analysis, the dancer’s elucidation made a larger point about the “rhythm of the step” and about the performer’s musical understanding of Balanchine choreography overall.

Similarly, in “the cakewalk” step, Ashley’s movement approach seems looser than her partner’s and it highlights a greater off-balance impression. As a result, there is a hint of relaxation, or a sense of a naturalistic action. This is not a typical balletic approach. The movement thus refers to the shifts of weight in the everyday, pedestrian style, rather than adhering to the strict rules of ballet aplomb. In the interview Ashley explained the effect. Conceptually, she suggested that the “cakewalk” step should be seen as another version of “falling”. (This idea links to Cook’s point about the theme and variations concept, p.123.) In Ashley’s words, the “cakewalk” step also expresses the idea of “falling in control, but still falling”. “It is as if the power pushes you forward, and pushes you back, and to the sides — your hips are doing that whole step” (Ashley, interview, 28 October 2011).

Ashley's idea that the "hips are doing that whole step" seems in contrast with Tallchief's explanations evident on her film. Tallchief insists on a far more steadying execution of the "cakewalk" step. In particular, there is a difference between Tallchief's and Ashley's ideas about the use of the pelvis, and the thrust of the hips. In this step and throughout the variation, Tallchief vehemently corrects and directs Whelan not to slant her torso at a wider angle and to avoid hip initiation (which Tallchief considers to be "distortion" of the alignment). To illustrate the subtler level of the relaxed, yet poised body attitude in the "cakewalk" step, Tallchief offers Whelan the image of "Fred Astaire". With this image, which she then repeatedly uses through the coaching session, Tallchief illustrates the modestly relaxed aplomb: an elegant swagger, rather than the overtly off-balance movement.

Ashley's impression, however, was that nearly "every movement" in 'Sanguinic', is off-balance. "There is very little that seems on-balance", as the "Sanguinic" woman is "completely pulled by the hips" (Ashley, interview, 28 October 2011). Even when Ashley was initially asked to summarise the whole variation as if explaining it to someone who has not seen it, the off-balance concept came out very strongly:

It is hard to describe "Sanguinic" because so much of the early part is about shifting weight and off-balance movement... There is all this suspension, falling and leaning toward something. It seems to me that "Sanguinic" is very much about being drawn to something. And needing, wanting to get there. Being pulled in many directions, and there's such life force and rhythm and impetus behind what you're doing. As if you are being pushed and pulled constantly — pulled toward something, and pushed toward something (Ashley, interview, 28 October 2011).

Ashley does not mention that Balanchine ever objected to her off-balance interpretation. As she explains, Balanchine did not say very much at all, but he did demonstrate all the steps. There were, sometimes, very specific directions about particular steps. For example, Balanchine stressed precise timing for the opening. "He was so emphatic about plié-ing in

the wing there, on that one-two-three-foouur...” as he may have been “setting the stage” for the whole variation (Ashley, interview, 28 October 2011). But the off-balance movement is not something that he remarked upon.

As can be seen in their films, Ashley and Tallchief continue to apply their distinct approaches throughout the variation. For example, in the second female solo (sub-section 2), among the signature movements are the ballerina’s vast, advancing piqué steps across the stage, alternating between the high développés devants with cambrés and arabesques penchés. As before, Ashley uses a wide, *peripheral kinesphere*, reaching far in front of herself (or behind, in the arabesque) always nearly pulling herself almost completely off balance. This effect of self-destabilisation is increased with cambrés developing *successively*, as if they were caused by unsettling high kicks, appearing to give the dancer a whiplash. Her bending in the upper body suggests a clear connection with the bent spine of “Melancholic”. In her interview, Ashley stressed that the développés relate to the idea of “gobbling up the space”. The step should stress qualities such as reaching far and out rather than upwards: “[I]t is all about travelling through the space” (Ashley, interview, 28 October 2011).

Some dancers do accentuate the upward action in these battement steps, however. Rather than reaching out as far as possible, Bussell, for example, kicks her leg very high upwards, as if aiming to punch a six o’clock position. Her movement emphasises verticality, and the use of *central kinesphere* implies stability. Similarly Ogden, who performs the movement slightly more off-balance than Bussell, still aims high with her leg. In Tallchief’s detailed coaching approach the focus was on the port de bras that should initiate the movement, and she also advocated the upward action. (“You should think mainly, frankly, about getting

your leg up — that’s more important than this”: Tallchief demonstrates this by thrusting her left hip *sagittally* forward.)

In the interview with Cook, I mentioned these two different approaches to the off-balance in “Sanguinic”. Cook felt sympathetic to Tallchief’s restrained approach, and also advocated care as he was concerned about the implications the apparent freedom would have for dancers from other company cultures performing the work.<sup>12</sup> As Cook explained, *The Four Temperaments* should be viewed as an early example of the “displacement of the classical placement”:

You have to have the intention of it being the first idea of the hip out, and Maria is absolutely right, if you overdo it, it becomes crass and it doesn’t show the subtlety of the development of this off-placement in the tombé (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).

While the aim of this section is neither to establish the most appropriate approach to staging the variation, nor to analyse all the changes in the variation over the years, it is interesting to observe the great care with which the dancers treat what they perceive as the choreographic intention. With that in mind, it is plausible that the differences between Tallchief’s and Ashley’s styles reflect changes in Balanchine’s own attitude toward “Sanguinic” — perhaps being inspired by different dancers (as explained in 4.0). Equally, it may be that the perceptions of a daring off-balance movement from 1950s (the time of the Tallchief version) have changed by the time of Ashley’s interpretation in late 1970s. Perhaps the first “displacement of the classical placement” was no longer enough for Balanchine more than two decades later, after having worked with dancers such as Farrell, who was famous for her daring, off-balance experimentations in the 1960s. This example shows that the idea of the dancer’s “habitus” within the dynamic company culture (as

discussed in Chapter 3) seems to be a useful method for gaining a deeper understanding of the different approaches.

Contemplating these influences is useful, although they are not investigated further here. The key subject of this analysis is the correlation between the dancer's conceptualisations and the dance as apparent to the viewer. It is therefore crucial to emphasise two main points. Firstly, Ashley's and Tallchief's approaches reveal an equal and direct correlation between the dancer's ideas and the movement as apparent in the performance. This is similar to what was found in Cook's performance in "Melancholic". Ashley's (more contemporary) approach shows her concept of being "pushed and pulled" by the hips, which completely colours her approach. Ashley built her individual interpretation by following the choreographer's verbal and non-verbal cues, which is again similar to Cook's process.

Secondly, the details of movement phrasing give us a different impression about the solo, but also highlight the importance of this section in relationship to other parts of the ballet as a whole. Ashley's approach, for example the curving in the upper body and "being pushed and pulled", destabilises verticality and links the "Sanguinic" woman with the movement qualities seen in the "Melancholic" variation. Furthermore, her reading of the choreographer's actions also creates an interesting musical commentary, as seen in her six-count step in the "turning phrase" or in the "cakewalk phrase" which she reads as a "falling step", thus amplifying the "theme and variations" aspect. Tallchief takes a very different approach, different references and images ("Astaire", "Egyptian friezes") that resulted in a very different style of movement. Equally, however, both dancers' ideas were significant, and both clearly translated into the dance movement.



In this sense, a major difference between what the spectator sees and what the dancer perceives is found in the approach of another performer, repertory company dancer Sonia Rodriguez from the National Ballet of Canada. Rodriguez had a particularly interesting interpretation. Her overall approach is closer to Ashley's, especially in the range of dynamics in sub-section 1. As a very fast-moving dancer, Rodriguez, similarly to Ashley, performs the movement in the "turning phrase" with a definitive twist in the hips, thus accentuating the piano. (This was not the effect of staging. Ogden, the other dancer in the Canadian version, had more restrained turns and, although she had some off-balance movements, there was not as prominent a dynamic accentuation of the hip movements.) Rodriguez also seemed particularly playful, and there was an impression of interesting interaction with the other dancers (in particular with her partner, Antonijevic). She painted a picture of collaboration or of partners in play, and of vivid musical visualisation, composed of high dynamic contrasts (especially between *sustained* and *sudden* movements, *direct* and *flexible* spatial approach). Of all the dancers, Rodriguez's approach particularly reminded me of Croce's description of the "Sanguinic" ballerina as "an allegro technician" but "also a character" (2000, 151). The same effect was notable in her live performances in 2006 and 2009.

Rodriguez was only interviewed after her 2006 performance (Tomic-Vajagic, 2008). As the dancer was not available for the interview later and, since the effects described above were already so striking, I asked her about her ideas about "Sanguinic" and about her interesting and energising performance. It was very surprising to learn that Rodriguez did not have any particular conceptualisations to share about this role. As the dancer explained, there was no particular imagery, and her musical approach was apparently instinctive and certainly not analysed or planned. Rodriguez explained that she enjoyed the music and

performing the variation, but this was not one of the roles that she had thought through in great detail, as she was more focussed on performing the steps. As her spectator, I nevertheless found the performance highly expressive and I thought that this might have indicated a particular cognitive reading of the role.

This finding (that the dancer's and the spectator's ideas do not relate) does not change the impact of Rodriguez's interesting interpretation in any way. Although she did not have much to say about it, Rodriguez's contribution was very distinct. She shaped the role through dynamic contrasts, great speed, daring movement and a sense of large *kinesphere*. Although she did not think about the movement qualities, her interpretation could be associated with an internal understanding of the choreographer's movement style. Therefore, rather than judging Rodriguez for not offering verbal explications, I would argue that this is a situation where the dancer's reading may be denoted as non-verbal. The difference between Rodriguez's and Ashley's processing of information may remind us of Kirsh's point (discussed in 2.3) that some dancers embody the choreography by "thinking non-verbally". This interesting example may indicate a rich area for future cognitive study, and it is of interest to record it here as a useful contribution to the understanding of the nature of the dancer's contribution in plotless ballets. As these different examples demonstrate, the dancer clearly may contribute with strong effects, whether or not she is conscious of them. (This point is reminiscent of Giddens's concept of agency, discussed in 2.1.)

The movement analysis of "Sanguinic", similarly to that of "Melancholic", revealed a great amount of detail about different dancers and their approaches. It showed how Balanchine's resident company dancers developed their own readings through individual observations

and understandings of the choreographer's movement demonstration. Sometimes the dancer's explanation helped to illuminate the effect observed in the movement analysis, as in Ashley's approach to "the turning phrase". However, unlike in "Melancholic", the dancers in "Sanguinic" did not develop so many story-like and metaphoric images, or referred to the type of person or character in the role, or even discussed "Sanguinic" in terms of a type of mood. (The only dancer who mentioned anything similar to a character was Canadian ballerina Lamy, who imagined herself as an "urban, edgy New Yorker". Regrettably, her recording was not available to enable observation of whether this imagery impacted upon her dancing style and the appearance of "Sanguinic" overall.) The repertory company dancers who were both observed and interviewed (Ogden and Rodriguez) did not say very much about the role, which may have to do with the plotless nature of the variation. This did not, however, change the fact that their interpretations (particularly Rodriguez's) were just as revealing about the nature of the dancer's contribution.

As in the "Melancholic" solo, different approaches to the finer details of the "Sanguinic" movement material not only shaded the same choreography in new ways, but they also shaped the overall variation in distinct ways. Ashley's approach, in particular, emphasised possible links between different variations. As was apparent from the analysis, her strong off-balance approach referred to the theme of falling present in the whole work, and her backbends related to the pliant upper body of the "Melancholic" man. Again it is apparent that small details of particular variations that are particularly visible in the spare aesthetic of practice-clothes ballets reveal plenty about the nature of the dancer's contribution, but also show new potentials for readings of the dance work overall.

#### 4.4 *AGON* (1957)

*Agon*, in part a choreographic visualisation of the mathematical principle of “twelve-note” music composition,<sup>13</sup> to many may be the first association with Balanchine’s black-and-white leotard ballets. Perhaps even more than *The Four Temperaments*, this ballet may be seen to exemplify the notion of dance “abstraction” (in Osborne’s sense, discussed in 1.1). Maybe the most famous image to explain this dichotomy between abstraction and human content in *Agon* is given by Balanchine’s closest ally, Kirstein, who in the print programme for the premiere famously compared *Agon* to a computer (which in 1957 was certainly an abstract image in itself): an “IBM device, but one that thinks and smiles” (Kirstein, 1970, 242).

The work is also famous as one of the closest collaborations between a choreographer and a composer, in terms of designing “the structure of the ballet during the creation of the music” (The George Balanchine Foundation, 2007). Musicologist Robynn Stilwell discusses the *Agon* music as a structure of “compartments” (1994, 309). In her music-movement analysis of *Agon* from the dance perspective, Jordan found that the micro-structure of Stravinsky’s music may be viewed as “a series of formal cells or blocks” without breaks in between (2000, 154). Balanchine, who was excited about the possibilities of twelve-note composition,<sup>14</sup> used the idea of black and white costuming from the point of conception in *Agon*. As observed in 1.4, it is quite possible that Balanchine intentionally used the possibilities of the black and white visual contrasts to achieve graphic effects through visually checkered patterns.

After its premiere on 1 December 1957 in the City Center in New York City, as a highly inventive ballet, *Agon* was immediately affirmed by the critics for its bold movement and

formal exploration (see Reynolds, 1977, 182-185). Denby's famous article describes the "enormous ovation" after the premiere (1987/1957, 264). Although the ballet is plotless and can be seen as abstract, references that imply certain character and story associations nevertheless may be found. Denby, for instance, perceptively observed how "classic dancing [in *Agon*] shifted into a 'character' style" through changes in movement accentuation (1987/1957, 264).

The shift appears, for example, in the timing of transitions between steps or within steps, the sweep of arm position, in the walk, in the funniness of feats of prowess ...While the ballet happens, the continuity one is delighted by is the free-association kind. The audience sees the sequence of action as screwball or abstract, and so do I (Denby, 1987/1957, 264-265).

Balanchine (and Stravinsky) certainly helped the possibility of "free-associations". There were evident political (inter-racial) connotations in the central duet casting (of Adams and Mitchell, as noted in 1.4). Furthermore, the title of the ballet and the musical score is a classical Greek word that signifies the complex concept of "contest"<sup>15</sup>, and the names of particular sections reveal inspiration from the dance forms and music of the Renaissance.<sup>16</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, however, it is of less interest to analyse these particular meanings and their origins than to observe whether any of the dancers engaged with similar references in the development of their performing approaches.

#### 4.5 "BRANSLE GAY"

As seen in the previous examples from *The Four Temperaments*, the dancer's ideas and approach to details can change the viewer's perception of both the dance and the music. Since the exploration of music is very important for Balanchine's choreography, it is of interest to observe closely how different dancers' approaches to a solo variation may musically influence the dance work. Due to its clear structure, the female solo "Bransle

Gay” is a particularly useful area of focus for an investigation of the correlation between dancers’ conceptualisations and their musical responses in *Agon*.

The solo is part of the “Second Pas de trois”<sup>17</sup> performed by two men and one woman. The female solo is the middle of three Bransle dances, and although it is brief in duration (forty-five seconds), it is very rich musically and choreographically. As dancer Calegari noted, the variation sits like a “jewel” within the ballet (interview, 16 December 2011). The context of twelve-note musical composition is also relevant for this section. As Jordan (2000) and Joseph (2002) have explained in great detail, within the partial-serialism of *Agon*, “Bransle Gay” is one of the sections that belongs within this type of composition.<sup>18</sup> The music of “Bransle Gay” is composed predominantly for woodwind instruments and castanets (and in isolated moments, strings may be heard as well). Often, this section is associated with “Spanish” flair, due to the “castanet” sound that is heard as an underlying rhythmic pattern.<sup>19</sup> Two men underscore it by gesturing (clapping) from the sides of the stage. Joseph explains Stravinsky’s interest in the baroque form of “bransle” which was a circular, “round” dance, often including the “clapping of hands, shaking of fingers” (2002, 234).

With all this complexity, the movement material in the female solo appears deceptively undemanding. Denby, however, insightfully noted the fine line between the apparent simplicity and the undercurrent of supreme musical sophistication that structures the dance.

The solo, as he describes it, represents “a marvel of dancing at its most transparent”:

She seems merely to walk forward, to step back and skip, with now and then one arm held high, Spanish style, a gesture that draws attention to the sound of a castanet in the score. As she dances, she keeps calmly “on top of” two conflicting rhythms (or beats) that coincide once or twice and join on the last note. She stops and the house breaks into a roar of applause. In her calm the audience has caught

the acute edge of risk, the graceful freshness, the brilliance of buoyancy (Denby, 1987/1957, 268).

The dancer whose performance Denby captures is the original performer Melissa Hayden, who explained that dancing the “Bransle Gay” was not as easy as it may have appeared:

There was no story, no melody, no mood to the music to guide me. I was there alone with sharp shifting rhythms, isolated notes, and sharp angular movements (Hayden, quoted in Joseph 2002, 270).

For the purpose of this analysis, the structure of the solo is discussed in relation to Jordan’s model (discussed in Jordan 1992, 2000 and 2002). Jordan’s structural analysis reveals how the principle of formal musical building blocks illuminates “Bransle Gay” as well as where it situates this dance within the whole ballet. In her analysis, Jordan discusses the performers’ contributions, finding that sometimes the dancers add another layer of musical commentary on top of Balanchine’s visualisation of Stravinsky’s musical structure. Jordan’s findings thus offer a useful starting point for this analysis.

The musical structure of “Bransle Gay” is viewed by Jordan as two distinct phrases. Choreographically, Balanchine divides each musical phrase into two dance phrases, giving us a sense of four smaller “building blocks”. By doing this, Balanchine develops his own musical commentary, initially by choreographing steps that closely adhere to the musical beat. As the dance evolves, the choreographic movement gradually pulls “further and further away from the rhythmic structure of the music as the solo progresses”, drawing “back to it temporarily during the castanet transition bars” (Jordan, 2002, 157). As Jordan explains,

A sense of heightened energy or small climax near the end of this dance results from the interplay of musical-choreographic rhythmic organisation, which contributes significantly to the shape of this little solo (Jordan, 2000, 157).

The solo is structured through four distinct dance phrases:

- Phrase A: (dance counts, which also refer to the musical metre, 7-5-5-7) this phrase represents a “clear example of ‘dancing to the beat’” (Jordan, 2000, 158);
- Phrase B: (5-7-7-5) looser “articulation of the pulse” (Jordan, 2000, 158); “contrapuntal layering between solo flutes and clarinets” (Joseph, 2002, 270);
- Phrase C: in music, measures are even (6-count units), but the dance is split into three smaller units (composed of 5-5-5-5 steps): “the dancer establishes her own definite five-beat metre with two repeating units of material” (Jordan, 2000, 158);
- Phrase D: a turning phrase travelling downstage, ending with the “castanet” port de bras.

The woman in the beginning of the dance (A) articulates the music of the clarinet and flute through vibrant footwork. She switches between approaching and withdrawing away from us, by moving sideways, turning, or retreating on a short diagonal. As the dance develops (and as Jordan sees the choreography more loosely articulating the musical pulse, in phrase B), Balanchine starts using longer movements, including piqué arabesques and développés. The movements also begin to grow slower and more *indirect*. Balanchine occasionally includes strong accents. For instance, he interjects the succession of elongated movements with a *sudden* and *direct* light beat of the legs (a cabriole), or with a pulse-beating “castanet” arm gesture.



The longer movements persist for a while (through phrase C). The dancer continues to grow distant, as she glides on a diagonal. Retreating from us across and slightly upstage, she is preoccupied with pushing the air in long, slow arm movements. At the same time, she laces this phrase with quick, staccato footwork (piqué steps). Reiterating the repeating musical melody, she then drifts in the opposite direction (a soft passé/retiré phrase), waving the arms widely and airily. But, the two brief dips (soft pliés) precede the diagonal phrase. As Jordan explains, Balanchine's insertions of the pliés mark the time when we hear the sounds of harp and strings in the solo (2000, 161). She emphasises the importance of this moment — Balanchine makes us pay attention to the musical “punctuation point”. (He first introduces the idea of a sophisticated caesura in this moment in Verdy's version, although there was no actual plié at that stage yet, see Jordan, 2002.) The solo concludes (phrase D) with the dancer re-establishing her direct relationship with the musical beat. She also reconnects with the viewer, returning swiftly downstage toward us in a *direct*, accented turning phrase. The dance ends with another quicksilver “Spanish” castanet arm gesture.

The great diversity of movement qualities in this short solo makes it more difficult to point out the key signature actions. Indeed, the great variety of movements is in itself one of the main features of the dance. Nonetheless, several other elements may be highlighted:

- the variation is filled with intricate footwork;
- there are contrasts between quick and slow movements and short and long diagonals;
- long movements are often punctuated by quick accents;
- there is a juxtaposition between staccato footwork and legato arm actions;
- overall the dance alternates between the moments of *directness* and *indirectness*.

Although the steps did not change greatly, the movement style evolved with the different casts — even during the Balanchine era. Stilwell remarks that Muriel Topaz, as the notator in the 1959 score, marks the movement style as “sharp and crisp” yet the 1987 score had no such style indication (1994, 176). Stilwell suggests that this change may have been the result of the more rounded and softer approach of the later dancer, Calegari, who most frequently performed the role during Balanchine’s late period.

While Stilwell makes certain speculations about the casting, Balanchine’s rationale for the stylistic changes is not known. At interview, Verdy explains that “Bransle Gay” was performed by many different dancers in the company,<sup>20</sup> as it was a “very good piece to try new people”. This brief dance was “quite a challenge — a kind of Bat Mitzvah of sorts” (Verdy, interview, 9 October 2011). Ashley confirms that she had also performed the variation, but was not filmed <sup>21</sup> in it (interview 28 October 2011). In the Royal Ballet too, the roles in *Agon* were sometimes given to dancers on the rise. Deborah Bull confirms that she danced in both trios at various points in her career. (Her early soloist role was the “First pas de trois”.) Having a solo in *Agon* so early to Bull felt like a “very good first step into solo work”. While “most dancers progress through other roles... for example, *The Sleeping Beauty* fairies’ solos”, *Agon* seemed an appropriate career-building step, because it “felt very close to classroom technique, and the costumes were similar to classroom clothing” (Bull, telephone interview, 29 June 2011).

COMPANY	SOLOIST	INTERVIEW	PERFORMANCE RECORDING
New York City Ballet	Violette Verdy	Telephone interview, 9 October 2011	Mercure, 1960; Jordan, 2002
New York City Ballet	Maria Calegari	Telephone interview, 16 December 2011	New York City Ballet (1983)
The Royal Ballet (staging Patricia Neary)	Deborah Bull	Telephone interviews, 17 May 2011; 29 June 2011	Roehampton Institute (1994)
New York City Ballet	Wendy Whelan	n/a	New York City Ballet (1993); Jordan (2002)
The Royal Ballet (staging Patricia Neary)	Mara Galeazzi	n/a	The Royal Ballet (2009)

Fig. 4.5 Recordings of “Bransle Gay”

The sample of performing approaches in this section spans over four decades: from Verdy’s energetic and coquettish performance (Mercure, 1960), to the elegant and exacting rendition of the Royal Ballet’s Mara Galeazzi (Royal Ballet, 2009). As in the previous sections, not all the dancers were interviewed, but those who are, represent different performing cultures and training backgrounds. Verdy and Calegari worked with Balanchine directly, while Bull had worked with the staging expert (Neary). Two more New York City Ballet dancers were interviewed (Hayden in 2004,<sup>22</sup> and Ashley in 2011) but currently there are no known films of their performances.

These examples represent a range of distinct performing approaches. This is easily observed, beginning with the opening phrase (A) which, as Jordan pointed out, delineates each beat. Here Bull and Whelan (dancers from different company cultures and training backgrounds) both underscore clear sharp accents on opening counts. Among all the dancers observed, Whelan’s movements are the largest in terms of *kinesphere*, just as they are the quickest (see fig. 4.6 for detailed accents). Bull is not as fast in her movement initiation, but her accentuation that is tied to the beginning of each unit also creates a percussive effect. While the differences in the two dancers’ approaches could be attributed

to their training backgrounds,<sup>23</sup> they both generally emphasise the staccato approach of the phrase. In comparison, Calegari's articulation of phrase A appears to be far less literal. Whether her dancing is observed in silence or with the music, it is very difficult to decipher any major accents, as her movements seem fluidly linked. As fig. 4.6 indicates, Calegari blends the movements by gliding through the music without noticeable stresses on any particular counts. Of all the dancers analysed, hers is the only legato interpretation in the essentially staccato phrase A.

These different styles of articulation produce clearly different effects. Calegari's approach smoothes the phrase, while Whelan and Bull make us pay attention to the isolated steps. The differences become even more pronounced with the progression of the dance. This is very important as it has implications for the perception of the dance overall: although the distinctions are seen in subtler qualities (rather than in greater step modifications), the overall shape of the solo seems changed. For instance, Bull and the other repertory company dancer Galeazzi maintain consistent movement dynamics in their performances, stressing all four phrases with similar strength and clarity (and in a consistently staccato manner). In this sense, there is an impression of straightforward, linear progression of the solo. This is different, however, in the resident dancers' approaches which instead create different kinds of arcs in the development of the dance. It is particularly telling to look closely at the details of Calegari and Whelan performing.



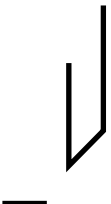
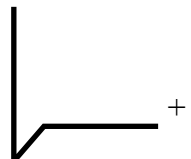
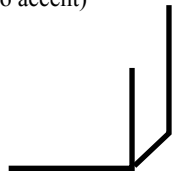
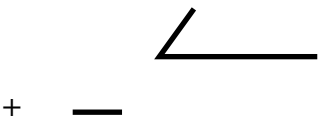
Whelan's staccato phrasing from the initial phrase (A) continues to stand out even in the phrase B, which is, as Jordan explained, choreographically characterised by the extensions of movements across more than one beat. Whelan nevertheless maintains a sense of percussiveness and urgency. She also continues to emphasise a straightforward relationship

to the viewer by maintaining direct eye-contact with the audience. Such an approach thus evokes a historical link with the “crisp” style of the original (Hayden’s) interpretation.

But there is a strong sense of shift in Whelan’s movement qualities in the complex phrase C. Her staccato approach is now de-emphasised (in contrast to Bull’s performance, for instance). This is particularly evident in the succession of four gliding backward steps. Here Whelan emphasises the elongation and the softness of the arms (rather than the brusque footsteps), pressing through the air indulgently, as if repeatedly pushing an imaginary balloon in front of her. All of a sudden, it seems that the ever-efficient Whelan begins to savour the moments. In Laban’s terms, there is a shift from the *fighting* side of the spectrum towards an indulging, decelerated and far more *sustained* approach (fig. 4.6).

Throughout phrase C, Whelan maintains this effect of luxuriating in the movement. As Jordan observed earlier, Whelan’s pliés are particularly pronounced (2000, 160-161). They are soft, large sinks that are deeper and calmer than in performances by other dancers. Therefore, there is an effect of prolonging the musical accent — the emergence of the string and harp sound. In agreement with Jordan regarding Whelan’s pliés, I also noted a powerful image created through her coordinated action of the upper and lower body. Mirroring the pace of her sinking, Whelan raises her arms, slowly encircling her body. As she delineates a grand *kinesphere*, the viewer feels unexpectedly transported into a different place — a kind of underwater scene. The effect is pneumatic, as if we are watching a diver pushing herself off the bottom of a lake to rise to the surface. This brief moment of sub-marine repose is quickly over, however. In the final, turning phrase (D), Whelan seems to snap back into her habitual effort combination (*quick, direct, bound*). She wraps up the solo urgently, stressing again the ends of turns with an arabesque leg action.

She punctuates the ending by stressing the final “castanet” gesture with economy and percussiveness.

“BRANSLE GAY”	MARIA CALEGARI	WENDY WHELAN
<b>Phrase A</b> <b>(counts in brackets)</b> 1. (7) 2. (5) 3. (5) 4. (7)	Accents on beats are not emphasised : only a slight accent on the développé, (count 2 in unit 1) the effect: crossing the beat or moving through music.  <i>Light, bound : de-emphasised</i>	Clear accents in each unit: 1. accents on counts 2 and 7; 2. accents on counts 2 and 3; 3. accents on 2 and 5; 4. accent on 7 The effect: staccato.  <i>Direct, bound, quick</i>
<b>Phrase B</b> 1. (5) 2. (7) 3. (7) 4. (5)	Creates two larger units: 1. - 2. sustained arabesque-rubato effect, 6-7; 3. - 4. accent on end point: upward arm movement, 5.  <i>Indirect, light and sustained Effort combination known as “float”</i>	1. accent on 1- 2; 2. accent on 7; 3. accent on 7; 4. accent on each gesture (1-2-3-4-5) : staccato emphasised.  <i>Direct, light</i>
<b>Phrase C</b> 1. (5) 2. (5) 3. (5) 4. (5)	1. no major accent during piqué steps with the pushing port de bras 2. accent on held retirés (with arm sweeps) 3. pliés: quicker and shallow 4. -- (no accent)  <i>Indirect, light and free</i>	1. long, sustained port-de-bras; contrast with quick piqués (1-3) 2. -- (no accent) 3. Échappé and plié (arms up): sustained 4. -- (no accent)  <i>Bound, sustained</i>

#### 4.6 Highlights of Calegari and Whelan’s interpretations in the “Bransle Gay” solo

Calegari's phrasing, however, is quite different. As already established, Calegari emphasises legato from the beginning (phrase A). Her delicacy and her elongation of movements are further amplified in phrase B. For instance, there is a gentle rubato produced by a sustained *développé* that extends into an attitude (in the unit 2 of phrase B, see fig. 4.6). Calegari performs this movement with a simultaneous breath in the upper body, trailing slightly behind the music. But, in this phrase she starts to add variety — the cabriole jump is punctuated decidedly and swiftly. Musically, by accenting these two moments (rubato in attitude in the middle of phrase B, and the cabriole at the end) she emphasises the endings of two alternative micro-units (5-7-7-5). Calegari therefore draws out a sense of two larger blocks (12-12), instead of articulating the actual four musical cells (as the other analysed dancers do). With such an approach, she adds her own individual commentary of the mathematical possibilities found in Stravinsky's twelve-note compositional game, as well as in Balanchine's visual layer. This echoes the point discussed in 2.1 about the levels of readings that exist in the dance work, where dancers may add their own interpretation to the choreographer's idea.

It is clear that with such an original articulation of the initial phrases (A and B), Calegari's overall shaping of the "Bransle Gay" already is very different to Whelan's. In the rest of the dance too, one may notice that Calegari continues in a varied manner with a dominant softer quality. For example, as marked on fig. 4.6, she again creates rubato by holding the *retirés* slightly longer in the second sub-section of phrase C. Her *kinesphere* is more modest than Whelan's, and she still maintains *indirectness* and legato. She even projects a sense of abandon by complementing the long movements with soft flowing arms. Only the articulation of the final, direct and virtuosic phrase (D) brings Calegari into a more *direct*

and *quick* realm, which is in significant contrast with the rest of her approach. She still ends the dance on a delicate note, softening the castanet gesture with a breath in the shoulders. By subtly shrinking and unfolding, she adds an impression of three-dimensional *shape flow*.

Two interpretations of the “Bransle Gay”, by Calegari and Whelan, therefore seem very differently shaped. Whelan’s percussive and energetic approach book-ends an elongation of the indulgent phrase C. There is a sense of distinct musical phrasing, for example accentuating the moments when we hear the strings. Calegari’s legato approach shifts only at the end (D), with the vibrant finish. This shaping of the solo with the change in the finale draws out a link between the solo and the succeeding fiery trio.

Calegari and Whelan thus give us two different overall perspectives on the solo, and also portray two different images of a woman. Calegari amplifies the sense of elegance and the delicate approach through the combination of legato phrasing, *lightness*, and the suggestion of a modest *kinesphere*. Her solo may be perceived as a woman’s expression of gentleness, but also a signal that she will meet the prowess of two male partners in the fast and vigorous Coda, following “Bransle Gay”. Whelan seems to be the embodiment of an independent, authoritative and athletic young dancer, who moves efficiently and, by using a more generous *kinesphere*, swallows the space as if deciding her own terms of play. In comparison with the two later performers, Verdy’s performance from 1960 presents a sweet image of a woman, expressing an uplifting mood. She is *direct*, flirtatious, and sends sparkling gazes and smiles into the camera.



This wide range of dancers' approaches may be considered in relation to the discussion of the dancer's habitus in Chapter 3. It is beyond doubt that a combination of factors is behind each individual approach, as there are significant differences between trainings,<sup>24</sup> as well as in the company culture. Balanchine's company was very different at the times of Verdy's, Calegari's and Whelan's respective performances, as each perhaps refers to a landmark moment: Balanchine's peak of experimentation with black-and-white ballets (Verdy's performance in 1960); the choreographer's final period (Calegari's performance in 1983); and the first post-Balanchine generation of dancers (Whelan's performances in 1990s and 2002). In interview, Calegari, whose path seems more typical for a dancer of the Balanchine era, indicates a complexity of influences in the development of this role. In particular, she expresses her gratitude to Schorer who taught her the solo (Calegari, interview, 14 December 2011). Whelan, who danced the role under the new director, Martins, does not emphasise this role, but credits the new environment in the company (working with new choreographers in addition to dancing core Balanchine/Robbins repertory) as the key influence on her overall development as a performer.<sup>25</sup>

The contextual reasons, therefore, greatly contribute to the dancers' approaches. But, as found in the interviews, dancers' conceptualisations are also important. For example, Calegari maintained that she habitually did not think of any story-like themes in this and other plotless ballets. "For me it was just about energy... I guess the closest I might have come was to think of some colours... like a 'flame'... But, no, I didn't get to the 'images'" (interview, 14 December, 2011). Her concentration, as she explains, was on the music: "I'm listening... and that takes up the whole thing" (interview, 14 December, 2011). As Calegari felt, this active listening provided the rationale for her overall shaping of the variation. She spoke about the music which "stretches out" in the middle of the solo, while

“the end is very much with the beat”. In this sense, the articulation of the contrasts could be achieved:

I really believed in doing sharp, and then when you can let go and do slow, then do that. Because I think that makes it [the performance] interesting (Interview, 14 December 2011).

Similarly to what was found about Balanchine’s dancers in *The Four Temperaments*, Calegari combines her own ideas with Balanchine’s directions. In the interview, she attributed the musical phrasing of drawn-out movements (in the phrase B) to Balanchine’s idea: the held movement in the *développé* was the effect that the choreographer “wanted there.” However, her own overall musical articulation was also important, and it depended on her listening to the music very carefully. As she explained, one clear image that transpired in her interview had to do with the impression of “being a musician”. Calegari found that the “castanet” port de bras referred to the memorable gesture of the young god Apollo, playing strings (in Balanchine’s 1928 ballet under the same title). With this image she also indicated that the “Bransle Gay” solo could be seen in association with other choreographic themes from Balanchine’s opus.

Similarly to “Sanguinic”, in other conversations with dancers about “Bransle Gay”, fewer programmatic images emerged overall. Verdy, for instance, mentions a sense of friendly “oneupmanship” with her male partners in the trio opening (interlude) and the Coda, but not in the solo. She and Calegari both used the term “jazzy” to explain the movement qualities of the “Bransle Gay”. However, in both dancers’ interviews, the term “jazzy” related to the sense of the movement articulation — a sense of swagger — rather than to a thematic motif, or an imaginary situation. For example, Calegari explained that the shoulder breath in the “castanet” port de bras should be seen as a kind of stride: “there was a little bit of jazz in there with the hip thrusts” (Calegari, interview, 14 December 2011).

Verdy also used the term “jazzy” to describe the solo as the most light-hearted part of the trio (Verdy, interview, 9 October 2011).

Although there were no characters and stories for most dancers, it was interesting to note that all the interviewed dancers emphasised their impression that the solo was a display of “femininity”. Ashley, for example, spoke about the “sensuality” of the solo (interview, 28 October 2011). Although the dance “of course is not flamenco”, she said, it certainly has references to it, and some “of that spice”:

Because it’s all about changing angles, and the rhythm... the sensuality is in there, somewhere. Partly because I didn’t do many roles like this I felt that... I was showing another side of my personality that people hardly ever saw. So that was kind of nice to say — I’m not so formal... and I have another side of me too (Ashley, interview, 28 October 2011).

Calegari in her explanation emphasised the delicate movements and softening: a slight breath of shoulders. “It’s always lovely to look feminine. And... the leotard roles are naturally a little sexy or... I don’t know if that’s the word, but what other word could you use?” (Calegari, interview, 14 December 2011) Bull also felt that the solo allowed her to express a different, “extremely feminine” facet of her personality (interview, 29 June 2011). Although in comparison to Calegari’s and Verdy’s performances, Bull appears more restrained in her performance, this internal feeling certainly emerged in comparison with the other roles in which she was often cast.

I think the challenge with being a strong dancer, which I guess I was, is that you’re not often allowed, or not always able to demonstrate, femininity. Because generally strength is associated with masculinity. And so it was one of those roles in which it was nice to be extremely feminine (Bull, interview, 29 June 2011).

Banes makes the point that “Bransle Gay” is an expression of the independence of the woman. There is a new kind of femininity in this solo that is not always conventional —

“demure or diminutive” (1998, 201). Different conceptions and portrayals of “femininity” that dancers read in the solo and expressed in their interviews are thus as distinct as the observed dancing approaches. For example, both Bull and Verdy singled out the gliding combination with long arms (phrase C) as moments where they feel at their most feminine in the solo. Bull, for example, noted: “[E]longating the pushes as much as possible and then following with the very neat little ‘picks’ [steps] — I think that sense of femininity coloured the way I approached the choreography” (Bull, interview, 29 June 2011).

But as if echoing Banes’s point about a different kind of femininity, to Bull the sense of feeling “feminine” in the solo and a sense of power were not mutually exclusive. There is “something very powerful about doing those small solos”, she admitted. She performed “Bransle Gay” during the time when she felt the most comfortable in her career, and therefore felt that her clear simple approach was a way of communicating with the audience:

It [“Bransle Gay”] is a role in which... you almost need to create a relationship with the audience because it’s a very, very simple dance, not the fireworks. So it is sort of like a conversation with the audience, which is punctuated by the rhythm — the claps... It is almost flirtatious actually. And very much it feels a role in which you’re in control. It’s as if the stage and the house stops for a moment... There is a different kind of power (Bull, interview, 29 June 2011).

It is interesting to note that Bull’s conceptual approach emphasises feeling like herself, not feeling in character. Yet, this sense of having a conversation with the spectators and showing an aspect of herself somehow reads as sharing a kind of a narrative about herself, perhaps exposing an idea about her performing personality. This effect of the dancers speaking about their own “personality” emerging on stage was not often recorded in the Balanchine examples and it is interesting to note it here, as it brings us back to the

beginning of the thesis (referring to Franklin's dilemma of being "himself" on stage, discussed in the Introduction, pp. 1-2).

This analysis of the "Bransle Gay" in many points related to the themes found in the discussion of *The Four Temperaments*. Through their approaches the dancers integrated the choreographer's ideas and their own. The details of movement helped us observe larger points, in particular those related to the musical interpretation and possibilities. In terms of dramatic imagination and references to characters and stories, this solo was closer to "Sanguinic", where dancers often thought in abstract concepts. It was interesting, however, to note that all the dancers' conceptualisations included the theme of "femininity" in one way or another. In this solo, the musical phrasing was particularly interesting, and the comparison between Calegari and Whelan showed very different musical articulations that shaped the solo differently. Similarly to the previous examples, the influence of the choreographer was very important. As observed, Calegari for example interpreted the role with a sensitivity to Balanchine's ideas but has also developed her own musical reading. All the approaches also indicated the possible influences and impact of company culture, training and the dancer's overall habitus.

#### 4.6 BALANCHINE'S EXAMPLES: A SUMMARY

The analysis of dancers in the roles from two of Balanchine's ballets in this chapter offered an insight into a variety of interpretative approaches in plotless roles. These contributions were apparent through movement analysis, as well as by considering the performers' ideas. While both ballets shared very similar aesthetics — spare, practice clothes, black and white leotard ballets with minimal stage production elements — the dancers found a wide range

of approaches to their roles in them. There was a varying degree of abstraction: “Melancholic” provoked elaborate discussion about the narrative and the characters, while “Sanguinic” and “Bransle Gay” elicited far less. Overall, while the dancers in “Melancholic” felt compelled to read the movement in a narrative manner, the dancers in “Bransle Gay” found the least amount of stories, perhaps due to diminished melody and the “sharp shifting rhythms and isolated notes” of Stravinsky’s twelve-note score (Hayden in Joseph, 2002, 270). There were some interesting themes (various images of “femininity”) as well as connections to other ballets in Balanchine’s opus (*Apollo*), and finally a sense that a dancer introduces a narrative about herself into the performance. In “Sanguinic” there were also very few narrative plot-lines, but there were several strong images (for instance, Ashley’s idea of being pushed and pulled, as if “toward something”, Tallchief’s “Fred Astaire” and “Egyptian friezes” imagery). Similarly, in *Agon* there was a powerful image offered by Calegari’s -- the dancer as a musician.

The two female solos, “Bransle Gay” and “Sanguinic”, showed how dancers from the Balanchine company used different combinations of abilities to conceptualise and execute the same dance. Analysing the performances by dancers from different eras in the same company demonstrated the trajectory of the same roles through changes over time in the company culture. From what could be observed in this chapter, the possible influences are very complex and further research may position them more precisely within the idea of habitus, as indicated in the Chapter 3. The dancers are influenced by different aspects of their training, but also by the dynamic construct of the company culture, including the choreographer’s proximity. (Cook, Tallchief and Ashley in interviews all indicated how they learnt to observe the choreographer very closely, and to read embodied directions.)

Musical training with Balanchine certainly influenced sophisticated musical approaches. (Ashley had very interesting ideas about the articulation of steps in “Sanguinic” and, similarly, Calegari demonstrated her attentive listening to the music in *Agon*.) Although in all the interviews with the dancers I focused equally tightly on their solos, Balanchine’s dancers often linked their roles with other parts of the ballet. Through the theme of “falling”, Ashley and Cook extended the discussion to the “theme and variation” idea in the whole ballet; Verdy discussed distinctions between “Bransle Gay” and the partnered dance, the “Coda”. Some of these dancers even observed links between their leotard ballet roles analysed here with different ballets in the Balanchine repertory (for example, both Calegari and Cook discussed references to *Apollo* in their respective roles in *Agon*).

Repertory dancers offered different, yet equally interesting information. In “Melancholic” the freedom of interpretation enabled by the staging for the resident company dancer (Konvalina) resulted in his own analytical reading, which ultimately shaded the movement with interesting dramatic effects. Bull, in “Bransle Gay”, indicated a very interesting approach and meaning behind her dance that did not intentionally refer to a story, but did in fact imply a type of a real-life narrative about the dancer’s representation of self on stage and the relationship to the viewer. It was also very useful to understand that some dancers do not necessarily intellectualise their roles (Rodriguez in “Sanguinic”) yet that their agency is clearly visible in their embodiment of the part.

The example offered by Rodriguez was unique, however, as it was more often found that there is a clear correlation between the dancer’s conceptualisations and their performances. Two different cognitive interpretations of the “Sanguinic” (Ashley and Tallchief) painted the role with different colours. Even with such differing approaches, both dancers still very

much kept the choreographic idea in mind. A similar correlation between the dance and the mental images was found in the repertory company dancer Konvalina's interpretation of "Melancholic", where the dancer's ideas directly translated into the movement. A similar conclusion could be found about the ideas of Calegari and Verdy and their interpretations in *Agon*. But, not all the relationships between the mental images, ideas and the dance were so straightforward, as Rodriguez's case reveals. A different type of complicated relationship emerged in resident company dancer Cook's performance in "Melancholic". Cook's cognitive interpretation, combined with the encouragement and the limitations set by the choreographer, produced a complex effect, where the dancer reads into things conceptually yet somewhat different qualities are read into his dance movement.

As shown in the discussion in the previous examples, the movement analysis reveals the finer qualities of the performance and also gives us plenty of other information about the dancers' approaches in plotless ballets. In "Melancholic", the analysis of the two dancers' movement qualities also explains very distinctive approaches in the creative process. As a result, they also made the spectator's experience of the whole variation very different. While Konvalina portrayed a stormy inner life of "Melancholic" and led the spectator to perceive high contrasts in the music, Cook built the impression of a narrative in a more gradual manner.

The examples so far indicate that the dancer's contribution in Balanchine leotard ballets most often emerged through a close negotiation between the choreographer's verbal and non-verbal instructions and their own ideas. Equally, it was found that sometimes the resident company dancers were freer to develop autonomous approaches, and that sometimes the way that a dancer's agency becomes visible in a leotard ballet role may not



be the result of consciously planned actions. All the points observed in this summary will be revisited and elaborated in Chapter 6. Before that, the next chapter (5) investigates a different set of choreographic examples taken from Forsythe's distinct choreographic repertoire from the final decades of the twentieth century.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 4:

<sup>1</sup> *Haieff Divertimento* (1947), *Concerto Barocco* (1941/1945 and 1951 versions), *The Four Temperaments* (1951 version), *Square Dance* (1957), *Agon* (1957), *Episodes* (1959), *Monumentum pro Gesualdo* (1960), *Modern Jazz: Variants* (1961), *Movements for Piano and Orchestra* (1963), *Variations* (1966), *Symphony in Three Movements* (1972), *Stravinsky Violin Concerto* (1972), *Duo Concertant* (1972), *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1974), and parts of *Ivesiana* (1954). All ballets and productions are explained in Reynolds (1977). Additionally, Garafola (2005, 244) suggests that a certain foreshadowing of the same aesthetics appeared as early as in Balanchine's works from the 1920s (for example, certain costumes in *La Chatte*, 1927).

<sup>2</sup> The original version (performed in the colourful and ornate production design by Kurt Seligmann) premiered on 20th November, 1946, as a part of the launch of the Balanchine-Kirstein subscription-based Ballet Society. As noted by Croce, (2000/1971, 148) the novel choreography signified a "fresh start, reestablishing bases and the direction of American ballet". The ballet's original title *Four Temperaments* was modified soon after its premiere to include article "The," according to *Balanchine Catalogue* (The George Balanchine Foundation, 2007, online). After Balanchine stripped the costumes, apparently much was still exciting about the ballet. The movement came into clearer focus, revealing a "naughty" reinterpretation of "classical line" and interrogation of conventions of traditional partnering (Goldner, 2008, 39).

<sup>3</sup> For example, "Melancholic" was initially (performed by William Dollar) "more acrobatic than it later became" (The George Balanchine Foundation, 2007). The 1977 television adaptation by Ardolino and Brockway, involving the choreographer's direct participation in the filming and editing choices, includes some spatial and temporal adjustments. As Jordan explains, the musical "tempo was deliberately speeded up for the camera" (2000, 169).

<sup>4</sup> *The Balanchine Catalogue* notes over one hundred international stagings since 1960 (the year when the Royal Swedish Ballet premiered the ballet). See The George Balanchine Foundation (2007, online).

<sup>5</sup> After Dollar, the role was performed by many New York City Ballet dancers, notably Herbert Bliss, Jacques d'Amboise, Arthur Mitchell, Cook and in more recent generations, Peter Boal and Victor Caselli. In the National Ballet of Canada, the role has been recently performed by Antonijevic, Konvalina and Hirano, and in the Royal Ballet recent dancers were Frederico Bonelli and Samodurov.

<sup>6</sup> For example, as quoted in Banes (1998, 195): "Storyless is not abstract. Two dancers on stage are enough material for a story".

<sup>7</sup> Maria Tallchief (in Reynolds and Brooks 1996) also mentions these references, for example the phrase where the female dancer is in a supported pirouette (four turns alternating en dedans and en dehors) is a reference to a circular running phrase in "Theme Two", when the male partner runs around the woman, all the while supporting her.

<sup>8</sup> Other notable dancers in the role include Patricia Wilde, Ashley, Whelan and Kyra Nichols in the New York City Ballet. In a recent production of the National Ballet of Canada, the female role was danced by Rodriguez, Greta Hodgkinson and Ogden, and in the Royal Ballet initially by Ann Jenner, and recently by Bussell, Jamie Tapper, and Zenaida Yanovsky.

<sup>9</sup> In the original version, the performers were Mary Ellen Moylan and Fred Danieli, but in practice clothes version the female role was danced by Tallchief.

<sup>10</sup> African-Caribbean/African-American social “festive dance” the cakewalk originated from the enslaved Africans on plantations, and had a humorous air (in fact, an underlying satirical component). The signature step is a “shuffling movement” with a “backward sway”, evolving “into a smooth walking step with the body held erect” (Lynn Foyle Emery, 1972 as quoted by Brenda Dixon Gottschild, 2005/1998). “Cakewalk” *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*. Cohen S.J (ed.) Oxford University Press, Inc., e-reference edition, accessed at: <http://www.oxford-dance.com/entry?entry=t171.e0309>.

<sup>11</sup> Ashley counts: “...One-two [plié], turn three, arabesque four, pull in five, hold on six” (Ashley, interview, 28 October 2011).

<sup>12</sup> While Cook liked Ashley’s approach, he expressed a concern that other dancers might interpret the Balanchine subtle off-balance similarly to, for example, Forsythe’s more liberal hip displacements (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).

<sup>13</sup> As Jordan explains, twelve-note composition represents a method that uses “the twelve notes of the chromatic scale as a fixed template governing the melodic and harmonic content of the piece, but as well as playing it in its original form, it can be inverted or played backwards as retrograde, the inversion can be played backwards and the retrograde can be inverted” (2007, 198).

<sup>14</sup> Jordan (2000) and Joseph (2002) explain that Stravinsky explored twelve-note techniques at least since 1952, the year when he formally accepted Kirstein’s commission of the score. Balanchine’s curiosity about twelve-note music fully developed during his collaboration with Stravinsky in *Agon*, and persisted during the 1950s and the early 1960s. Other twelve-note ballets including 1959 *Episodes*, 1961 *Modern Jazz: Variants*, 1963 *Movements for Piano and Orchestra* and 1966 *Variations* are from this period.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph (2002, 225) reminds us that “by the end of the fifth century,” the concept of *agon* was the core of Greek comedy. “It was a contest waged between the play’s principals toward winning over not only the other characters involved in the dramatic action, but also the members of the audience and the men sitting in judgment of the competition.” Joseph (225-226) teases out an additional connection between Stravinsky’s exploration of linguistic morphology (“the flow of language, syllabication, accent, meter...”), particularly in reference to T.S. Eliot’s poem “Sweeney Agonistes” (exploring the idea of *agon* as “the archetype of a modern urban life”).

<sup>16</sup> The composer’s interest in classical Greek drama is combined with an exploration of Renaissance music forms. *Agon* sections and dances including “Bransles”, “Saraband” and others reference François de Lauze’s seventeenth-century manual of French court dances, and his 1623 dance treatise *Apologie de la danse* (sent to the composer by Lincoln Kirstein in 1954) (Joseph, 2002, 225-226).

<sup>17</sup> In Jordan’s structural analysis, “The Second Pas de Trois” is the third section within the ballet’s structure: Section 1 (Pas de Quatre-Double Pas de Quatre-Triple Pas de Quatre); Section 2 (First Pas de Trois: Prelude-Saraband Step-Gailliar-Coda); Section 3 (Pas de Trois: Interlude-Bransle Simple-Bransle Gay-Bransle Double); Section 4 (Interlude-Pas de Deux) and Section 5 (Four Duos-Four Trios-Coda).

<sup>18</sup> In the Bransle dances Stravinsky composes “the top line of the sketch is the row in its original, or prime form; while the lowest line shows the start of what will be an inversional form as it ultimately appears in the piano and trombone parts of the final score. The violin solo in the middle layer is nonserial” (Joseph, 2002, 249).

<sup>19</sup> Jordan goes further to explain that the castanet rhythm “becomes exposed” in the music and then in the dance too, as if to provide a rest from the rhythmically demanding sections. Joseph (2002, 270) explains that castanet clicks are used by the composer “as formal markers: to introduce the dance, to separate the two phrases of the A section, to divide the entire section from the B section, and finally to close the dance”.

<sup>20</sup> In addition to Hayden, Verdy, Calegari and Whelan, in other New York City Ballet productions the role was danced by Lourdes Lopez, Maria Kowroski, and at present Teresa Reichlen. Some dancers who performed the role are not recorded or mentioned in the various analyses of the work. Stilwell for example points out that the role perhaps should have better suited Ashley, instead of Calegari. However, Ashley in the interview (28 October 2001) clarifies that while she is not recorded on film, she performed the role and was coached in it by Balanchine.

<sup>21</sup> There are films of Ashley in *Agon*, but of her role in the “Pas de Deux”. Both she and Calegari in fact performed both roles, as they explain in their respective interviews.

<sup>22</sup> The original dancer, Hayden was interviewed very early on, in 2004, and this interview was also used in my unpublished MA thesis (Tomic-Vajagic 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Bull was trained in the Royal Ballet School, while Whelan was exposed to several styles of ballet training, including the Royal Academy of Dancing (RAD) syllabus, Maggie Black method and the School of American Ballet (Whelan, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> The professional training for Verdy was very different as she trained in France before joining the company, as noted in 3.1. Calegari and Whelan seemingly had more similar training — both taught at the School of American Ballet, and also had the internal training within the New York City Ballet. Yet, upon a closer look, Whelan's background as she explains (Whelan, 2011, online), was more diverse. She came to the SAB in her senior years. Prior to that, she trained with the teachers from the Paris Opera Ballet, and others who taught in Black's system, that includes principles of "the theory of physical alignment" (Zeller, 2009, 61). Calegari, also a dancer from the Balanchine era and training strategy, had her own complex set of influences, such as being the first generation of students to work with Schorer.

<sup>25</sup> As Whelan explains in an online interview (2011), she entered the company in the early 1980s as the first generation after Balanchine. The company, she felt was in a state of flux, when Martins as the new artistic leader formulated his vision for the long term direction, which included the integration of new choreographic voices into the company's repertory. In 1988, a three-week long American Music Festival was organised presenting new commissions from choreographers who had not worked with New York City Ballet before, including Lubowitch, Dean, and Forsythe) (New York City Ballet, 2011/1998, online). Whelan explains "I just saw a huge range that a ballet dancer could do. These people [new choreographers] were from so many languages, but they all incorporated the ballet dancer's training and technique ... You can take what the past has, and carry it into the future, which is what I've tried to do with the Balanchine and Robbins ballets" (Whelan, 2011, online).

## CHAPTER 5

### WILLIAM FORSYTHE'S BALLETS IN THE 1980S AND 1990S

#### 5.0 INTRODUCTION

Part of Forsythe's opus created in the first decade of his directorship of the Ballet Frankfurt (1984-1994) shares the aesthetic of the leotard ballet sub-genre (1.4). The choreographer's own vernacular term for these works is "ballet-ballets" (Forsythe, in Sadler's Wells Screen, 2010), and in interviews (for example, Siegmund, 1999 or Tusa, 1999) he frequently emphasised his interest in the investigation of balletic vocabulary, its codes and conventions. Furthermore, as discussed in 1.1, Forsythe at one time explored aspects of the concept of "abstraction" in association with some of these works. In this research, however, Forsythe's works are equally recognised in their conceptual complexity. As Caspersen explains, Forsythe "rarely nails down the meaning of things in his work, preferring instead to assume that it might also be something that he hasn't yet realized" (Caspersen, email correspondence, 14 March 2011).

Examining the visual aesthetic in relation to the lineage of practice clothes ballets is one way of looking at Forsythe's earlier works. As seen in Balanchine's examples, this approach may bring us new information about the dance texts, as well as revealing useful information about the performer's work in them. While Forsythe does not position his ballets in relation to any particular sub-genre, the design elements of his "ballet-ballets" align with the tradition of leotard ballets. The aesthetic components are streamlined. The minimal scenography, yet paired with often intricately styled lighting, and with costumes in the style of leotards is very often designed by the choreographer himself. Without speculating about the reasons behind Forsythe's choice of aesthetics in this particular

period, for this thesis focusing on the dancer's role, it was useful to have the view of the performer. As the dancer in many of these ballets, Caspersen gave her view about the use of leotards and body tights in the context of Forsythe's Ballett Frankfurt ballets:

The body is evident — etched out — in a leotard. Although it is clearly the costume of a particular branch of a particular culture, it is also, on one level, a simplification of the scene — less character-oriented (Caspersen, email correspondence, 14 March 2011).

Sometimes this part of Forsythe's opus has been described as “neo-classical” and associated with Balanchinian tradition. Forsythe now has his own tradition, but parallels between his “ballet-ballets” and Balanchine's leotard ballets are still made. For example, a current dance programme (June 2012) of the Het Nationale Ballet, “Bill and Mr. B”, associates the two choreographers' aesthetics, presenting together their three practice-clothes works: Balanchine's *Symphony in Three Movements*, 1972 and Forsythe's *the second detail* and *Steptext*, both analysed in this chapter.

Dance writers also sometimes emphasised the connection between these two choreographers. Sulcas, for instance, noted that the earlier part of Forsythe's Ballett Frankfurt repertory evoked “the contemporary dynamism and aesthetics of George Balanchine's plotless, pared-down ‘leotard’ ballets”, only “pushed to the new extremes” of performing style, where ballet movement functions as “a usable language capable of new meaning” (2001, 11). Journalist John Percival saw links between Forsythe's movement style and Balanchine's, but also noted that those two styles reflected the values of their own distinct cultures and eras.

Just as George Balanchine, having established his own style of pure classic ballet as a standard for others to aim at, introduced a sharper, more angular neo-classic style in the Fifties with ballets such as *Agon* and *Episodes*, so Forsythe has gone a step further in turning ballet into a style that accords with the pace, structure and moods of the other arts at the century's end (Percival, 1998).

In this sense, if Balanchine's black-and-white ballets represent the practice-clothes genre in the middle of the century, Forsythe's "ballet-ballets" can be seen as paradigmatic examples of the leotard-ballet lineage at the turn of the twenty-first century. But, while arguing that there is value in discussing Forsythe's "pure dance" choreography within the lineage of leotard ballet, this research also underlines that, as Sulcas cautions us, his works resist "ready categorisations" (200b, 91). As with his other works, the ballets in question often stem from several simultaneous investigations<sup>1</sup> or, as Johnson puts it, they are constructed "through a convergence of many things" (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008). Forsythe's ballets, as well as his later works, often include both dramaturgically complex underlying concepts and cross-influences from dance movement and principles from other art forms.<sup>2</sup>

Current scholarly discourse emphasises the complexity in Forsythe's relationship with ballet (Franko, 2011, Siegmund, 2011 and Gilpin, 2011). For this research it is important that Forsythe's body of work continually investigates balletic concepts, which is not only the case in his earlier ballet-ballets but also in the later works where the ballet idiom seems less visible. As observed by Driver (2000, 3), "as Forsythe has often stated, he treats the premises of classical technique as a usable language capable of new meaning" (2000, 2). Caspersen also underscores Forsythe's affection for ballet which involves "his consistent assumption that we don't yet know all what ballet might be" (Caspersen, email correspondence, 9 August 2012).

This is certainly visible in the works in this study. In them Forsythe explores the idiom, and principles of codified balletic vocabulary and the conventions of the form as employed in

the theatrical setting. In the earlier repertoire overall Forsythe works with ballet principles including turnout and exploration of pointe work. There is a perceived emphasis on verticality, paired with the interrogation of the boundaries of the classical ballet line. But, the complexity of Forsythe's work is already evident in this aspect. Although the verticality may be an impression from the spectator's point of view, from the dancer's embodied perspective the exploration is not quite as literal. As Caspersen explains,

Even in the works where the dancers tend to be on their feet (as opposed to on their elbows, for example), there is always a focus on circular and angular counter-rotation and counter-pointed refractions within the body. Very rarely are we thinking about verticality. (Caspersen, email correspondence, 29 August 2012).

The dances analysed in this study also involve assertive spatial travel and an affinity for amplified personal space, often exploring its edges (*peripheral* and *transverse kinesphere*). The unconventional exploration of these elements thus produces the line that appears more extreme than that observed in Balanchine's de-stabilisation of the aplomb (discussed in the "Sanguinic" example, 4.3). In Forsythe's works the hips are more thrust forward, often there is a greater shift in the vertical axis, and the performers frequently seem to push themselves to the edge of the balance. But, it is important to understand that the concept of destabilisation of balletic balance in Forsythe's work is not necessarily similar to the way Balanchine explored off-balance concept in his choreography. As Caspersen explains, what appears as off-balance movement in Forsythe's choreography does not relate to the idea of "trying to do something while falling". Rather, there is a shift of "the center of balance that entails these angular refractions, lines of connection through the body in order to ride the motion. A correction we would often get was 'take your hips off center'. So, we were balanced, but not like a stack of blocks, more cantilevered or more spiralled." (Email correspondence with Caspersen, 29 August, 2012) Therefore, this explanation as well as Caspersen's previous quote about verticality (above) indicate how these investigations seek

additional complexities that can be found in the ballet idiom, but frequently go unnoticed in the ballet practice. After an extensive analysis of a fraction of Ballett Frankfurt's existing archival performance recordings, it is easy to agree with Gilpin, who found that, when performed by his troupe, Forsythe's choreography seems to welcome "the thrill of accidents" in the sense that it exposes "states of concentration" where accidental events reveal "unexpected possibilities" (2011, 117).

Equally, however, it is also evident that most of the movement material in these ballets is choreographed, rather than improvised, which makes such works more easily adapted to other companies, where dancers were not very familiar with the complexities of Forsythe's movement exploration. Nevertheless, when viewing the performances of dancers from different companies in this work, it is very important to underscore that the two main cultural groups (resident and repertory company performers) do not have similar creative processes and performing contexts, as discussed in 3.4. It can be expected that the performing experiences and styles are also very different. While dancers in Forsythe's company culture explore various conceptual aspects of movement in their daily practice, performers from the repertory companies are often unaware of the possible underlying concepts which exist in the ballet-ballets. This is why it is interesting to investigate what these different groups of dancers find to explore in the same movement material, and what they bring to it as a result.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Forsythe expects different things from different groups of dancers. As explained by Caspersen, Forsythe may adjust "the works to fit the dancers who are dancing it now":

The intention behind the piece stays, but he figures out, together with the dancer, what would allow that particular dancer or group of dancers to make it come alive.



Specific movements and whole sections of choreography are often re-choreographed as a result (Caspersen, email correspondence, 14 March 2011).

As Forsythe proposes, his choreography should be seen as an opportunity for exploration in any performing context. In this sense, Forsythe suggests, his ballets are well suited to those dancers who can develop “a discursive relationship with what they are dancing, rather than just ‘performing’ it”:

I say to the dancers, you must make a discourse when you dance. You have to make a re-affirmation of ballet and yet at the same time bring into question how ballet is danced (Forsythe in Brown, 2012, online).

Existing writings by dancers who worked directly with Forsythe further explain what such a “discursive” performing attitude might mean in the context of the resident company. As noted in 2.6, in the period relevant for this study, Forsythe drew on the principles of Laban’s *Choreutics* and such explorations certainly amplified the possibilities for discursive exploration by his dancers (as explained in depth in Caspersen, 2000<sup>3</sup> and Gilpin, 2011, and as seen in *Improvisation Technologies*, Forsythe 2000). From the dancer’s perspective, several published writings by Caspersen (2000, 2007a, 2007b,<sup>4</sup> and 2011) explain how her creative process analyses possible relationships that occur both within the dancer’s body and in the surrounding spaces. For example, in the earlier works, one of the investigations was related to movement initiation principles, questioning which points in the body “are initiating movement and which are responding to the initiation”:

There are countless coordinative reactions in the body that need to be allowed to happen in order for the initial, initiating movement to function properly. In order for these reactions to be effective they cannot be decorative, applied after the fact, rather, they must be the result of skeletal-muscular co-ordinations reacting to the original movement impulse (Caspersen, 2007b, online).

As Caspersen further elaborates, when performing Forsythe's choreography, a dancer explores dynamic relationships where cognitive and physical elements work in "constant and exquisite response to one another":

These chains are linked patterns of complex, dynamic relationships within the body that unify discrete components of a motion (and of the body) without blending them; bringing disparate sensations, concepts and forms together into a mutable, coherent form without losing the distinct qualities that the components provide. ... These kinds of relationship patterns are not unique to Bill's work, but occur in most dance forms. However, the practice of learning to identify, embody, enter into and create them is definitely one that is important for people working on Bill's choreography. This is true both for his current work [in *The Forsythe Company*, after 2005] and his earlier work (Caspersen, email correspondence, 14 March, 2011).

As discussed in 3.3, throughout the staging process in Forsythe's ballets (for example, as set by Johnson) the aim is that dancers from the repertory companies develop a level of analytical disposition but, due to various cultural constraints, an extended training is not always possible. In such situations, however, the dancers still may develop an exploratory approach in the work. The ways in which movement exploration in Forsythe choreography may be generated in the conditions of a repertory company are explained by the National Ballet of Canada ballerina, Greta Hodgkinson, who compared the process in this choreography, in comparison with the Balanchine material:

When learning his [Forsythe's] vocabulary, there are systems ...With Balanchine you might be in a position and the stager might say, "well exaggerate that step a little bit," ...but with Forsythe, that may be "ok, exaggerate the movement, and see what happens if you take your heel and you move it so far forward that the whole position shifts into something else." It was such an interesting way of looking at movement, that I hadn't experienced. I did not know anyone who worked or thought like that (Hodgkinson, interview, 23 October 2009).

Another example of discursive practice that is common to both environments is musical inquiry. This is another central aspect in Forsythe's choreography, even if (unlike Balanchine) he may not always begin with the exploration of the music.<sup>5</sup> As demonstrated

in research by Midgette (2000), Salter (2011) and Vass-Rhee (2010, 2011), Forsythe often considers music to be another structural material of spatial design and, in certain works, the composers create the specific “sound environments” that he envisions (Salter, 2011, 57). By working collaboratively with composers, Forsythe aims to transform “the position of music and sound in relation to dancing bodies” (Salter, 2011, 57). In his public statements, Forsythe defined the musical demands that he makes of his own dancers, but also of those performing in repertory companies. For example, in a filmed interview (Sadler’s Wells Screen, 2010), we can see the choreographer’s verbal and gestural explications of the required acceleration in phrasing of the basic ballet steps in reference to musical changes. Discipline in movement punctuation, Forsythe asserts, trains the dancer for a higher level of musical precision in performance.

This chapter investigates how different dancers explore the same material from Forsythe’s choreography through their individual and varying levels of engagement with his style and principles. As with the Balanchine case study, solo roles from two ballets are used as examples: *the second detail* (1991) and *Steptext* (1985). Both choreographies are performed internationally and, although both investigate the conventions and codes of balletic performance, they open up different exploratory paths for dancers. As with the Balanchine study, there are differences in the perception of possible meanings and allusions in these works. While some roles may seem to imply particular narratives and characters (for example, the relationship of the woman with her partners in *Steptext* may motivate some viewers to think of a story), others (such as “Nora” and “Tracy” from *the second detail*) seem to refer to the exploration of more formal concepts.

As in the case of the Balanchine case study, one of the works (*the second detail*) was viewed both in rehearsals and in several live performances (in the Canadian company) prior to analysing the dancers' interpretations on film. For both ballets the dancers were interviewed and these conversations revealed their ideas about the work.

<b>FORSYTHE BALLET</b>	<b>ROLES</b>	<b>DANCERS</b>
<i>the second detail</i> (1991)	"Nora"	Jill Johnson (BF); Dominique Dumais (NBOC), Jennifer Fournier (NBOC), Xiao Nan Yu (NBOC); Hayley Forskitt (NNB)
	"Tracey"	Jodie Gates (BF); Sonia Rodriguez (NBOC) Marine Lamy (NBOC)
		Additional viewing: Yumiko Takeshima (Dresden SB)
<i>Steptext</i> (1985)	Female role	Two performances by Deborah Bull (RB)
		Additional viewing: Gladys Acosta (National Ballet of Cuba); Yekaterina Kondaurova (Mariinsky Ballet); Dana Caspersen (BF) in the "Second Act" of <i>Artifact</i> (1984)

Fig. 5.0 Analysed roles and dancers

### 5.1 *the second detail*

A one-act, twenty-two minute ballet, *the second detail*<sup>6</sup> was originally created for the National Ballet of Canada, premiering in February 1991. The minimal visual aesthetic is described by *The New York Times* journalist Anna Kisselgoff after the Toronto premiere as an "artistic exploration" of "gray on gray" (Kisselgoff, 1991, online). The electronic musical score, composed by Willems, is paired with the sleek design of grey leotard costumes and, in combination, these elements contribute to the impression of a contemporary urban high-technology environment, or even a futuristic scene. Nearly all the design elements are attributed to Forsythe. The costumes are grey leotards/tights with long sleeves and black seams,<sup>7</sup> the lighting is bright, and the bare stage includes a row of simple grey chairs. (The interestingly styled top lighting and the chairs in combination

evoke an image of a public waiting space.) An additional design accent — a white, geometrical dress<sup>8</sup> by Japanese fashion designer Issey Miyake — was used as a prop in the original production. In the current version this dress is worn by a performer in the ballet finale (“The Hula” section), distinguishing one soloist (“Kate”) from the rest of the ensemble. Finally, a puzzling typographical design element (a small white panel with a mysterious inscription “THE”) that was added in the Frankfurt production, completes the visual identity of the piece.

Although all these elements may be seen as kinds of references, the ballet has no plot. Similarly to other works in the leotard ballet genre, the performers appear not as characters in a situation or story, but simply as contemporary dancers performing balletic movement. The names of the variations used in these sections follow the internal practice of the companies staging the ballet: the roles are named after the original dancers from the Ballett Frankfurt 1991 production. While in interviews the dancers refer to their roles by those names, a spectator of the ballet is not aware of them (in all the programme notes, the dancers are listed only collectively and alphabetically).

In some programme notes, however, the spectator receives some narrative indications. For example, in the Canadian productions (both the original 1991 and the 2008), while maintaining that the ballet is plotless — “unfolding in a setting of grey walls and floors”, with thirteen dancers who “extend each part of the body to their personal limits” — there is also an excerpt from a story by Ambrose Bierce. In it, the spectator reads about the inventor of a “flying machine” who exhibits his creation as a spectacle for the crowd, but when the construction fails, it serves as a starting point for the gathered spectators, who start building a new machine.<sup>9</sup> The reference obviously encourages spectators to view the

choreography as an opportunity to construct their own reading of the dance. Johnson, from the position of a dancer in all the versions, and now a frequent stager, explains:

There is no prescriptive way of watching *the second detail*. It has a very human quality to it — the dancers don't have stage personas and their entrances and exits aren't formalised; they walk simply in and out of scenes. As there is no narrative, it is important to look for the themes — the thematic choreographic passages, and to notice how the choreography relates to musicality... as well as the structure of the music (Johnson, 2008, online).

In *the second detail*, Forsythe presents certain questions that he also explores in some of his other works. There is a sense of blending boundaries between the spaces on-stage and off, between the ensemble and the soloists, between pedestrian actions and ballet codified movement. As soon as the music starts, the dancers begin to walk around the stage, or sit on the chairs and stand up again. The brightly lit, grey setting suddenly evokes an avant-garde playground filled with ensemble activity. Throughout the piece, there is a sense of cacophony, of groupings performing simultaneously in counterpoint (performers walking, dancing, jumping and falling alongside each other). Individual dancers often break from their groups, engaging in short virtuosic solos, duets or trios. Sulcas describes the atmosphere as “friendly, jazzy teamsmanship” (2000b, 91).

Similarly to many other Ballet Frankfurt ballets from this period, in *the second detail* there are differences when two cultural groups of dancers with different scopes of investigation perform the work. As discussed in 3.4, when Canadian dancer Lamy observed the difference in the Ballett Frankfurt's revision of *the second detail* in 1991, the investigation in Forsythe's company involved more conceptual exploration (the dancers “carried their notepads all the time”, Lamy cited on p.105). There were also larger sections of improvisation at the beginning of the ballet.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, in Frankfurt *the second detail* became integrated into the full-evening work *The Loss of Small Detail* (1991), revisiting

and expanding the explorations from an earlier ballet, *Loss of Small Detail* (1987).<sup>11</sup> As Sulcas explains, *The Loss of Small Detail* (1991) “uses *the second detail* as an opening section, contrasting its balletic, counterpointed” rhythmicism with the “boneless, dissolving movement” that dominates the second part. While there is a very complex relationship between these two works, for this research two points are the most important. Firstly, when performed by international repertory companies, *the second detail* is a stand-alone ballet, while in the Ballett Frankfurt repertory it was featured as the first act of a full-length work. Further, since *the second detail* was changed in Frankfurt, when it is performed today internationally the ballet is shown in the final Ballett Frankfurt version.<sup>12</sup>

These core differences indicate why there is a disparity between references that the two cultural groups of dancers may have had during the creative process in this work. Based on the discussions so far with the dancers in the Ballett Frankfurt, and on the literature available, it appears that the second part, *The Loss of Small Detail*, stood out as a more novel exploration for many performers. Johnson, for example, felt that while *the second detail* was plotless, the second part was infused with rich concepts, including many story-like elements. She could also find many connections to the situations from her own personal life (Johnson, 30 December 2008). In the literature (including Preston-Dunlop’s *The Loss Project*) more attention is paid to *The Loss of Small Detail*,<sup>13</sup> which is seen as one of the seminal pieces in Forsythe’s opus. In *The Loss Project* archive, the dancers (including Ana Catalina Roman) elaborate on the structural tasks that they collaboratively investigated in the process, but do not refer to the tasks in *the second detail* very often. For Forsythe’s dancers both parts represented an exploration of the conventions of balletic performing, including an analysis of ballet codified movement — the classical ballet deportment (épaulement).



Fig. 5.1 Épaulement in *the second detail*

Dancers of The National Ballet of Canada (1991). Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann.

(Image: courtesy of The National Ballet of Canada)

Forsythe and Caspersen in separate public talks<sup>14</sup> have explained that épaulement is often analysed in Forsythe's work as a system of sophisticated dynamic vectorial relationships between body parts. As Caspersen explains, the use of gaze in this sense is one of the important aspects in this complex system. This point is important for several works from the period, including *the second detail*, where the dancer uses the gaze “as a kind of compass”:

This kind of gaze forms the basis of classical ballet's épaulement: a set of complex relationships between the eyes, head, shoulders, hips, arms, hands and feet in the balletic form. The body, in épaulement, is a series of curvilinear forms — or directed lines or volumes — in angled relationships. The strong, outwardly directed, linear gaze of épaulement emerges as the result of the body's inner directional refractions. The angle of the gaze reflects the angles upon which the body orients itself. By focusing strongly in one direction, this gaze, or directed seeing, illuminates all the other directions that exist in relationship to it. It exteriorizes the geometries that dancers intuit through their experience of having a



body. It extends this geometry past the body into the room, and it expands and delineates the space and the relationships between the dancers, the stage and the audience (Caspersen, 2011, 95-96).

As Caspersen further clarifies, this complex exploration continued in the second part—*The Loss of Small Detail* — with “a different kind of gaze, one that was not outwardly directed, but rather moved at inverted angles to the coordinations in the body.” This new type of focus, or “disfocus”<sup>15</sup> involved the dancer turning the “gaze backwards”, as if seeing the space behind oneself (Caspersen, 2011, 96).<sup>16</sup> In her interview, Johnson also addressed the “disfocus” as the state that involves the whole body and brings the dancer into a more introverted phenomenal experience:

Forsythe once said, I don’t know if he would still say this now, but “*the second detail* is the West, and *The Loss of Small Detail* is the East”. *The second detail* is very much presentational, proscenium-based performance, and *The Loss...* was the internal. You know, we would use this kind of disfocused focus for *The Loss of Small Detail*, so you weren’t aware at all of the outside and it was pretty trippy (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008).

While dancers in repertory companies do not explore the trajectory from focus to “disfocus” (since they perform *the second detail* alone), they may find other themes from which they build their individual investigations. One of these dancers’ “discursive” themes may relate to finding a balance between the group and soloist segments in a situation where many performers share the space. Differences in the company cultures may be significant in this sense as well. As established in Chapter 3, embodied movement collaboration in the same rehearsal space very much reflects the culture of Forsythe’s company. (This working process is also very vividly captured in Figgis, 1996.)

This manner of negotiating the mutual space with a larger group on stage is not so typical for the soloists in the hierarchical construct within international repertory ballet companies.

As Konvalina (who performed in the National Ballet of Canada's staging in 2008) felt, there is a "double challenge" for the soloists that emerges from the performing structure, resulting from the focus on groups where "people relate to each other":

I was doing a part of "Manuel" and he was more of a soloist... I did not feel much part of the ensemble, as much as *the second detail* is about it. I felt like I was part of this group, or part of that group... then reacting to this one... And so, I think I always wanted to be part of that group-movement and make sure that I'm on the same music, on the same rhythm as the other people... Being a soloist, usually you don't have to be with anyone... So, I feel that there is a double challenge here — in a way you want to stand out because you are supposedly a principal, you should be better. But in some way, it's a challenge saying, "no, you know, I can do that — I can be a part of the group"... so I think *the second detail* was more about community, and how to be a part of that (Konvalina, interview, 23 October 2009).

The discussion above demonstrates that the analysis of performances by dancers in the Forsythe repertory has to take into consideration differences in the creative processes and company cultures. Forsythe's dancers may not view the group collaborations in *the second detail* any differently from those they experienced daily. Performers in the repertory ballet companies do not have the point of comparison between focus and disfocus. Furthermore, "balletic focus" in the context of a repertory ballet dancer's work is not unusual or, to borrow Forsythe's term, it may not serve as a discursive point, unless an issue is specifically explored during the choreographic or staging process.

During the rehearsals I attended, Johnson did not discuss épaulement with the Canadian dancers in great detail. She did, however, stress the principles of movement initiation that are particular to Forsythe's style, as aspects of the organisation of movement within the body. For example, in one of the rehearsals Johnson remarked that, even when the movements seem to originate from the smaller joints, they should be initiated from the torso core and the larger joints (such as the hips), involving the whole body as a system of movement. At other times, Johnson directed the dancers to think of the port de bras, as a

general suggestion in particular movement phrases: for example, “Try to enjoy the épaulement”.

From all observations, materials and conversations I gathered during the research, I would deduce that *the second detail* as a dance text is flexible enough to allow a range of different approaches (and some possibilities are indicated above). As previously established, the choreographer publicly explained his interest in the different approaches that may develop through an exploratory performing attitude. As Caspersen clarified, within the “very particular, angled use of the body — a way of using the coordinations of épaulement” — *the second detail* is open to different approaches.

That is an integral part of the piece, so in order for the piece to work, people need to be able to access it [“using the coordinations of épaulement”]. Inside that particular language the dancers work in individual ways. This means that people play/work with the material, bringing all of their skill, insight, and experience to bring it alive. So, the performances can be radically different, while the piece itself doesn't lose the integrity of its nature (Caspersen, email correspondence, 14 March 2001).

The following examples, as with the Balanchine case study, look at particular roles in *the second detail* and juxtapose different performances, with the aim of unveiling what different performers find in the same material. The film sources used for the analysis include a selection of archival internal recordings of *the second detail* made by the companies for their internal purposes. While none of the films of the full ballet is commercially available, some excerpts may be seen in Figgis's 1996 documentary, and several excerpts of the National Ballet of Canada and Dresden Semper Oper Ballett may be seen currently on these companies' internet presentations. *The Loss Project* archive (Preston-Dunlop, 2009) served as an important resource for understanding the processes behind the full-evening work, including an important recording of Ballett Frankfurt

(2002a). Unfortunately, on this film, the performers in *the second detail* are not identified, and thus the recording is used only as additional visual material. Another performance recording of the Ballett Frankfurt (2002b), with Johnson and Jodie Gates in solo roles, was observed at the National Ballet of Canada, and the cast was named. Among the textual sources, the analysis in this chapter draws on Driver (2000a), published and unpublished texts by Caspersen (2000a, 2007 and 2011),<sup>17</sup> and articles by Gilpin (2011), Siegmund (2011, 2011/2002) and Wulff (1998a, 1998b).

## 5.2 THE “TRACY” SOLO

The exploration of balletic épaulement appears as one of the key features in the female solo variation “Tracy”, named after Ballett Frankfurt ballerina Tracy-Kai Maier. This solo is performed in the succession of several female solos in the first part of the ballet, or more precisely part of the section denoted by Johnson as the “pas de six.”<sup>18</sup> The variation is of particular interest for its diversity of movement qualities and the interesting relationship that is built between the dancer and the spectator through the choreography.

Willems’s music in this section is structured from the isolated rhythmical sound of synthesisers, with an underlying steady beat. Forsythe responds by structuring the solo with many abrupt shifts of weight, angles and directions. There are many turns and half-turns and changes in the port de bras, coordinated with strong hip thrusts and high leg extensions. In result, it could be said that “Tracy” builds a relationship with the viewer through a range of movement surprises. This plotless variation is thus playful, with plenty of opportunity for off-balance movement. In Laban’s terms, it is filled with contrasts between *quick* and *sustained*, and between *direct* and *indirect* travel on stage. The length of

the solo is about one minute and forty-five seconds and the full variation may be viewed as 3 distinct (yet uninterrupted) sub-sections:

1. a keyboard synthesiser solo: “Tracy” dances alone;
2. acceleration of the synthesiser melody: the woman is joined by the female trio;
3. the underlying beat is revealed, and the faint sound of a distant “Nora” melody emerges: “Tracy” dances with the larger ensemble of men; a long travel across stage as an extended exit.

The soloist enters the scene by walking away from the audience on a diagonal. She stops in the centre, with her back turned to us. The sound of organ music reaching a quick crescendo seems to prompt her to begin on a startling note. The dancer taps the floor powerfully (a double piqué derrière action of the right foot), as if to make sure that everyone is paying attention to her. She then abruptly changes the direction, in a half-turn turns toward us, and simultaneously changes the épaulement. Suddenly, she faces the audience directly.

Through her dance, the soloist constructs a web of diagonals, often swiftly switching between facing away from and facing towards the audience. Particularly throughout sub-section 1, these changes often seem motivated by the shifts in the port de bras. In one moment, for instance, the dancer is in a croisé position elegantly extending her arms in front of her body. Accenting the succeeding musical note, she suddenly glances directly at the viewer and abruptly changes the port de bras — her body as a system of coordination responds by producing a new ballet line. Throughout this sub-section (1), it appears that dominant straight lines, verticals (in the body attitude) and diagonals (in the spatial

progressions), are interjected and softened by frequent round movements: swirling turns, chaînés and ronds de jambe.

In harmony with the overarching theme of community in the ballet, as the dance progresses, “Tracy” develops relationships with other dancers on stage. As the music changes (sub-section 2), three women start to mirror the soloist’s actions behind her back. She acknowledges them and at times dances together with them. Then, as the synthesisers quieten revealing the underlying beats, several men line up behind “Tracy” and start a phrase constructed through swift changes of épaulement. They face the back wall — away from the woman, and away from us. Thus, sub-section 3 not only reflects the change in the music, but also echoes the opening of the dance, and the return to the exploration of épaulement.

In these group segments (sub-sections 2 and 3), the soloist’s movement phrases grow more oblique. For example, when joined by the three women (sub-section 2), “Tracy” equally performs for the spectator (facing downstage), as much as for her female companions behind her (facing them, and away from the viewer, very often). At the variation finale (sub-section 3), when “Tracy” dances in front of several men, she appears to toy with the conventions of balletic performing. Her prolonged exit, slowly meandering sideways toward the right wing and away from us, teases the viewer. Although there are signals that the dance is winding down (the music is getting fainter, the soloist seems to be leaving the stage), the performer decelerates and holds the stage, seeming determined to continue building this strong relationship with us.

Among the general qualities that stand out in the “Tracy” role are:

- mostly terre-à-terre movement (feet remain on the ground; many développés and arabesques; some petit allegro but without bigger jumps);
- plenty of turns and soutenus;
- quick and intricate footwork;
- overall staccato phrasing;
- frequent changes of weight and direction (half-turns, fouettés, croisé to effacé; frequently facing away from the audience);
- quick contrasts between pedestrian and balletic movements (port de bras interjected with flicks of the wrists, upturned palms, displacement of hips/forward and backward thrusts).

Alongside these movement qualities that stand out from my, spectator's perspective, from a dancer's point of view the percussiveness of the quick footwork is one of the strong features of the solo. Through her embodied perspective of performer, Caspersen who performed the "Tracy" role in the Ballett Frankfurt explains:

When I think about *the second detail*, I am very aware of my relationship to the floor as a kind of percussiveness. This is opposed to *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated*, where, even when it is fast, there is a feeling of a longer swing, where the arc of the motion you are involved in might, for example, swing below you into the floor. So, in *the second detail*, the feet are very percussive and explosive, there are more tight, angular constructions in the body to negotiate. It is more like running down the complex slope of a mountain than flying through a mountain range (Caspersen, email correspondence, 14 March 2011).

The recording of Caspersen's performance is currently not available. Among the dancers analysed on film is Lamy, the creator of the Canadian role, who was observed in two films and was also interviewed. Rodriguez is another dancer from the National Ballet of Canada who was viewed on film and in rehearsals in 2008. A dancer from Ballett Frankfurt, Jodie Gates, is captured on one of that company's 2002 recordings, and was also interviewed.

Filmed performance by Yumiko Takeshima from the Dresden Semper Oper Ballett production was used as an additional source (fig. 5.2).

COMPANY	DANCER	INTERVIEW	PERFORMANCE RECORDING
The National Ballet of Canada	Martine Lamy	Telephone interview, 15 April 2011	The National Ballet of Canada (1991) and (1992)
Ballett Frankfurt	Jodie Gates	Telephone interview, 31 August 2011	Frankfurt Ballett (2002b)
The National Ballet of Canada	Sonia Rodriguez	n/a	The National Ballet of Canada (2008)
Dresden Semper Oper Ballett	Yumiko Takeshima	n/a	Dresden Semper Oper Ballett (2008b)

Fig.5.2 Dancers in the analysis of the “Tracy” solo

After viewing several dancers’ performances, it is apparent that the great variety of movements composed by Forsythe, paired with the slower pace of the solo, helps bring out significant differences in individual musical phrasings. While some dancers mirror the staccato quality of the musical score, others promote connective elements between the steps. Gates, for example, seems to ignite various points in her body to articulate and connect the movements, while Takeshima seems to emphasise movement isolations. Gates is unique in her way of moving that blends the steps together. She does not seem concerned to show us the finish of each particular step, before moving into the next one. If Gates’s dancing was a spoken text, she would have narrated the story without taking breaths between sentences, without pausing between thoughts.

Upon closer analysis, it is apparent that the legato effect is further amplified by Gates’s postural initiation of movements. Like a puppet pulled by oppositional vertical cords, her movements originate from the thoracic area, or radiate upward from her hips. This



performance echoes Caspersen's explications of the concept of promoting the "chains of relationships" between body parts, as cited on p.176. This is a very different effect from that seen in Takeshima's performance where the torso more often works as one unit, and the changes of *épaulement* seem to be initiated gesturally, motivated by the dancer's arms.

In the conversation it emerges that Gates's postural approach and method of drawing out movement connections relate to her additional training in Ballett Frankfurt. Gates emphasises the particular importance of her work with Forsythe on movement coordination. Although she does not speak about *épaulement* specifically, her explanation seems to reflect a very similar investigation:

I remember he [Forsythe] worked a lot with me on my extension and follow through of my port de bras. How the arms can reflect the legs, how the hands reflect the feet, that there's a connection... and interaction — a relationship with your body as you move through space. So I remember working with him on that in *the second detail*, as well as in other pieces (Gates, interview, 31 August 2011).

Gates's filmed performance, therefore, elucidates what an abstract investigation of *épaulement* may have looked like in performance. Her articulation of movement contrasts and accents throughout the "Tracy" solo is unique. There is quick and fluid travelling between the steps, and, as already established, the musical phrasing is also distinctive. The exploration of *épaulement* may thus have also guided Gates's musical expression. For example, in sub-section 1, Gates sometimes rushes through the complex arm movements and then accentuates musical cues directly on the beat before very quickly moving through the connecting step toward the next musical spot. Due to her swift movement initiation and travel from step to step, Gates sometimes uses the time she has gained to punctuate the legato phrasing by adding small accents. For example, in the opening movement (*piqué derrière* and *fouetté*, 1), she adds a small beat at the *coup de pied* to the backward step

before she turns towards us. Musically, Gates's performance shifts our attention toward the silences, as much as it emphasises the sounds in the score.

In the interview, Gates explained that although the tempo of the music is not fast, the speed of movement is important for her in the solo, as it is filled with steps:

That solo ["Tracy"] is almost like it was made for a soubrette. In an odd way. It was a fast solo... Feet have to work quickly and they are all connected through movement — quick pas de bourrées, and the dynamic is such that perhaps the only stop is in a finger (Gates, interview, 31 August 2011).

Furthermore, it was her thinking about the music that guided Gates's process in the role. She underlined the significance of musical "counterpoint and the use of polyrhythms" as the key attributes of the "Tracy" solo. It was also interesting to note her use of imagery, which was reminiscent of Clegari's idea of being a "musician" in *Agon*. Gates imagined herself as a percussive musical instrument in her process of movement exploration:

The feet and hands are dictating the counterpoint... in the music. Which is as if I'm playing a musical instrument with my body... If I was an instrument, a percussive instrument, how would I play? And how would that move me across the space. So ... that is how abstract a role can be (Gates, interview, 31 August, 2011).

In comparison with Gates, Lamy as the creator of the role in the original Canadian production built the role with a different expression of musicality, and through a less "abstract" approach. Although it is difficult to compare her solo step-by-step with Gates's interpretation (the "Tracy" solo has changed between the two versions<sup>19</sup>), it is nevertheless interesting to observe the overall qualities that Lamy emphasises. For example, in contrast with Gates, Lamy's main contribution is in a very legible musical accentuation, going through the dance as if guiding the viewer to observe all the musical phrases, one by one. When the melody is drawn out, Lamy also slows down or sustains her movements to follow the music. (For example, this is apparent in turns that decelerate, as if she wishes

that the movement would exhaust naturally.) Lamy's solo seems composed of well-defined beginnings and endings. She often uses the flicking of her wrists, or turns her head to look behind herself, acknowledging that the dancers in the rear are her viewers too. To continue with the orator metaphor, if Lamy's dance was a spoken text, she would deliver it by careful spacing out of the sentences, with pauses between them, and by clearly delineating beginnings, endings and accents in between.

However, the effect of the high modulations in movement that often occurs between steps is a particularly distinctive attribute of Lamy's performance. In fact, in her approach *effort* qualities shift so frequently throughout that it is difficult to summarise them into one overall dominant set of qualities. This is different in Gates's performance, where an overall combination could be summarised as *sudden*, *light* and *direct* (known as "dabbing", see Preston-Dunlop 1976d, 8), with fluctuation between *free* and *bound flow*.

But, Lamy's approach does not allow for a similar summary. For example, as fig. 5.3 shows, in a very short succession of movements (between counts 7-10) in the opening steps, the qualities change with exceptional frequency. This was a very interesting finding, as such quick changes in *effort* qualities are not a trait for which Lamy is particularly well known. Based on ten years of watching her various performances in the National Ballet of Canada, I would describe her performing style as *strong*, *quick* and *direct* overall.

As a subsequent interview revealed, the analysis of effort combinations used in Lamy's variation in fact correlated with the dancer's idea for the "Tracy" role. Although, as Johnson noted, the dancers do not have "performing personas" in the ballet, Lamy invented her own "French persona", a woman who was able to "do anything". This idea related to

her actual French-Canadian cultural background, and the abilities she aimed to display were also factually-based:

I gave myself a French persona... quirky, sassy, sensual, a kind of being who could do anything — from the quick footwork, to big jumps, to a lot of turning. It was about trying to be as versatile as possible within that solo and playing with the musicality. Sometimes I would do the movement slowly, and sometimes really quickly. There was a lot of leeway for interpretation. It was really a special feeling to know that I was trusted so much. He [Forsythe] just seemed so delighted with anything I would do... So it was very freeing, very freeing (Lamy, interview, 15 April 2011).

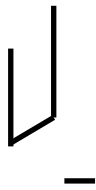
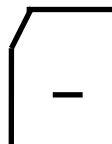
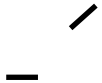
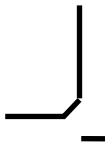
MARTINE LAMY - SWITCHING EFFORTS IN THE OPENING STEPS IN THE INITIAL MOVEMENT PHRASE (SUB-SECTION 1)	
	Step 1: grand rond de jambe en dehors, arms high upward (count 7)  Efforts: <i>light, sustained and indirect</i>
	Step 2: abrupt fouetté on her left foot into croisé (count 8); changing the direction toward the audience  Efforts: <i>strong, sudden, direct</i>
	Step 3: sus-sous (count 9)  Efforts: <i>sustained (step into fifth position relevé)</i>
	Step 4: high battement à la seconde (count 10)  Efforts: <i>sudden, free, indirect</i>

Fig. 5.3 Martine Lamy - changing *effort* qualities during one movement phrase

It is also important to note how Lamy's enthusiasm for working directly with Forsythe shaped her approach. While the impact of the choreographer's direct feedback in the studio provided great motivation and an overall sense of freedom ("very freeing"), it also gave a clear sense of limitations (which is similar to what Cook experienced working with Balanchine, in "Melancholic," 4.2). As Lamy explains, there was a clear understanding when she crossed the line in her expression of the "stage persona", which occurred mostly in the interactions with other dancers on stage:

I actually went too far with it as far as Billy [Forsythe] was concerned... He liked things abstract. He didn't like the acting-out on stage. And I actually remember him telling me, "Just tone it down a bit, because I don't want a big story out there". So, you know, as much as I did it for myself, I also had to accommodate the choreographer who didn't appreciate the story-line (Lamy, interview, 15 April 2011).

Lamy therefore consciously aimed to exhibit her own dance "versatility" and part of the reason behind this approach may be her confidence in her ballet school training. (As discussed in Chapter 3, Canada's National Ballet School strove to develop diversity in the dancers' training.) In addition to elements from her training and her use of imagination, her work with the choreographer both liberated and motivated Lamy, as well as demarcated particular limitations.

Regarding the approach of those dancers who did not work with the choreographer directly, it is useful to comment upon the performing approach of Rodriguez in the most recent production by the National Ballet of Canada. Although she was not available for an interview (as explained in 4.3), Rodriguez's interpretation of "Tracy" is of interest as it has revealed a new aspect in the relationship between the dancer and the dance work. Overall, Rodriguez's performance tends towards a more audacious approach where a "soubrette"

character stands out strongly. Her relationship with the music seems to combine elements of the previous two examples — sometimes the movements are connected seamlessly, and at other times she punctuates musical chords very strongly; she makes unexpected links between some steps, but also punctuates pauses. Rodriguez also moves quickly and introduces occasional, idiosyncratic wide and airy arm and leg movements to accent particular musical moments. She often emphasises off-balance steps, and underlines clever movements by glancing or smiling towards the audience.

Although she is unrestrained with her smiles and glances, Rodriguez's approach does not seem to cross the boundary into projecting the kinds of "narrative" effects to which the choreographer objected to in Lamy's process. This manner of interpretation, however, greatly increases the impression of playfulness and performing with quick wit. Rodriguez's gaze and subtler facial reactions are related to what is going on around her. In sub-section 1, when she is alone, Rodriguez appears to be interested in whether the viewers are following her closely during her journey around the stage. In sub-sections 2 and 3, where other female and male dancers join her, she engages with them more than other performers observed did in the same role. This performing approach strongly links "Tracy" (as the first clear soloist in the ballet) to rest of *the second detail* community.

Backed up by the ethnographic research, however, it is of particular interest to note that this approach establishes a clear connection between Rodriguez's performance style and her rehearsals. All the above elements observed in her performance on film were equally part of Rodriguez's creative process during the rehearsals. In the studio setting, her peers were her counterparts, but some were also her observers (as the dancers from different casts waited for their rehearsal run). In this kind of studio atmosphere, Rodriguez often

developed humorous and playful interactions with her colleagues in the studio. In some rehearsals she also attempted specific movements audaciously, often truly testing her balance. In the performance, therefore, there is a strong impression that Rodriguez closely transposed the atmosphere of the rehearsal onto the stage, thus linking the two situations directly. While the performance spectator could not be aware of this connection between her performing style in the studio and on the stage, this approach is notable as it helps us to see that a dancer can draw inspiration for the performance directly from the creative process backstage. As discussed in the introduction to *the second detail*, this ballet indeed blends the binary between off-stage and on, and Rodriguez's approach truly emphasises this aspect. Furthermore, as discussed in 1.4, the aesthetic of the leotard ballet genre helps to draw out such connections.

These interpretations of the "Tracy" solo show interesting and diverse approaches. Two dancers (Gates and Lamy), working directly with the choreographer, developed very different and equally interesting readings of the dance. Lamy's solo promotes percussiveness, and clearly demonstrates isolated phrases. Gates increases the sense of legato and makes the viewer aware of the connections between the steps, thus drawing out larger choreographic phrases. This dancer emphasised an exploration of music, but also of *épaulement*. This type of articulation seems to be a result of Forsythe's additional training.

The two dancers also spoke about very different ideas of the meaning of the solo. Gates was thinking in more abstract terms, exploring the representation of a "percussive instrument". Lamy developed movement through varied dynamics, thinking about highlighting her abilities. With this documentary communication of personal qualities, she also blended aspects of fictional imaginary, thinking of herself as a specific persona. The

work with the choreographer, in the case of Lamy, showed a clear sense of the limits to which the performer should go, but also demonstrated that the dancer developed a unique performing style that is specific to the role of “Tracy”. Another example from the repertory company (Rodriguez) revealed that a plotless ballet role may be built as a direct translation of the studio process into the stage performance, whether the dancer intended this effect or not. Although the viewers could not be aware of this, Rodriguez established a very similar relationship with the audience to that which she developed with her colleagues off stage.

### 5.3 THE “NORA” SOLO

“Nora” (named after Ballett Frankfurt dancer Nora Kimball) follows several female solos, including “Tracy” variation. The possibilities found in the solo differ from those discussed in the previous example — this time, the dance is highly energetic, virtuosic. The choreography for “Nora” also seems to inspire a wide variety of approaches. There is particular diversity in dancers’ expressions of the theme of “community”, for instance. Some performers amplify the sense that “Nora” is a prominent soloist who stands out from the group, while others position her as a member of her dancing community, equal to others. As it will be discussed in this section, these impressions depend on how the dancer in the role takes in the action developing around her.

The music in the variation is characterised by the steady beat of the drums in combination with the clicking sound of wooden percussion, and a melodic line of synthesised organs and strings. This is possibly the most recognisable musical theme associated with the ballet. The solo lasts about one minute and fifteen seconds, after which it evolves into a duet with the male partner, and within a larger group dance. Although the whole variation



develops without pauses, according to the changes in the melody and the choreography, it may be divided into several shorter sub-sections:

1. wooden percussion and drumming: the entrance walk;
2. organ music: “Nora” in the virtuosic solo, surrounded by several women;
3. string and organ melody: “Nora” with two women in unison moving upstage; then with two new women, moving downstage in a synchronised phrase;
4. recapitulation of the melody (from sub-section 3): “Nora” duet with the male partner.

Unlike the diagonal pathways of “Tracy”, the dance of “Nora” develops mainly on cross trajectory (moving forward and back, and side to side) around the stage centre. Due to her accentuated frontal disposition, the dancer has even more opportunities to form a direct relationship with the audience (through the use of gaze). In the various performers’ renditions, however, the eye focus and various aspects of efficient moving in space are given greater or lesser emphasis. The sense of verticality is very strong in this section, although Forsythe softens body attitude with space-swallowing curvilinear movements that are performed with wide amplitude. There are plenty of off-balance actions. Another noticeable difference between the dancers is the degree of *free flow* accents they use in this sense: similarly to what was noticed in Balanchine’s “Sanguinic” (4.3) some performers truly destabilise verticality, while others interpret movements in a more *bound*, restrained manner. Other general qualities observed in the role include:

- dominant *sagittal* spatial orientation;
- the use of a large *kinesphere*;
- pronounced virtuosity and athleticism (many quick turns, light jumps, including

entrechats, and in some performances tours en l’air; testing balance and recovering from off-balance actions swiftly);

- high leg kicks such as battements and développés.

As fig. 5.4 shows, several dancers are observed on film. (The exception is Yu in the Canadian production, who was not filmed, but was observed in several rehearsals in May 2008 and in two live performances in June 2008.) Of the three recordings of the National Ballet of Canada, the earlier two (from the 1990s) show the original version of 1991,<sup>20</sup> while the 2008 film represents the new adaptation. Due to the ethnographic methodology in the research, the Canadian 2008 production is observed in most detail. This time all the dancers were available for the interviews.

COMPANY	DANCER	INTERVIEW	RECORDING
Ballett Frankfurt	Jill Johnson	Telephone interview, 30 December 2008	Ballett Frankfurt (2002b)
The National Ballet of Canada	Dominique Dumais	Telephone interview, 31 May 2011	The National Ballet of Canada (1991) and (1992)
The National Ballet of Canada	Jennifer Fournier	Telephone interview, 27 April 2011	The National Ballet of Canada (2008)
The National Ballet of Canada	Xiao Nan Yu	Personal Interview, Toronto, 30 October 2009	No recording available (live performances June 2008)
Norwegian National Ballet	Hayley Forsktt	Personal interview, London, 28 April 2011	Norwegian National Ballet (2007)

Fig. 5.4 Dancers in the “Nora” solo

Differences between the dancers’ approaches are noticeable from the very opening of the solo (sub-section 1). The beginning of the dance similarly to the “Tracy” solo includes strong contrasts between pedestrian and balletic movement styles. The “Nora” variation begins as the clicking sound of wooden percussion returns. (The same sound was prominent in the ballet opening ensemble scene.) At this time, small groups of dancers

reconfigure on the stage, some performers exit and some retreat upstage and sit on the chairs. The scattered sounds of drum beats emerge, building a sense of anticipation. “Nora” stands up from her rear chair and walks downstage directly towards the audience. Once she reaches the central spot, she stops and crosses her feet into a classical fifth position (as if to signal that a balletic event is about to develop). She simply stands for several beats as if enjoying the centre stage, her arms freely hanging at her sides. Two female dancers join her on each side, and an additional row of women assumes a position in the back, all mirroring the soloist’s pose.

This long preparation for action is interesting, and similarly to “Tracy”, the “Nora” solo also starts suddenly, from stillness. Just before a major musical accent (a loud drumbeat that seems to trigger the organ melody), the soloist suddenly bursts into a complex arm movement sequence. She extends the arms out, then quickly folds them back across the chest, finally to powerfully throw them (out and upward) into a “V” shape. The action of the upper body is quickly and sequentially followed by the isolated sudden leg action: two quick piqués (that resemble stabbing of the pointes into the floor in an inward-turned plié, reminiscent of the letter “X”), followed by a *dégagé à la seconde*, and a high upward jump (most often *entrechat six*). The virtuosic jumping phrase is accompanied by the action of other female dancers (who perform different phrases in counterpoint).

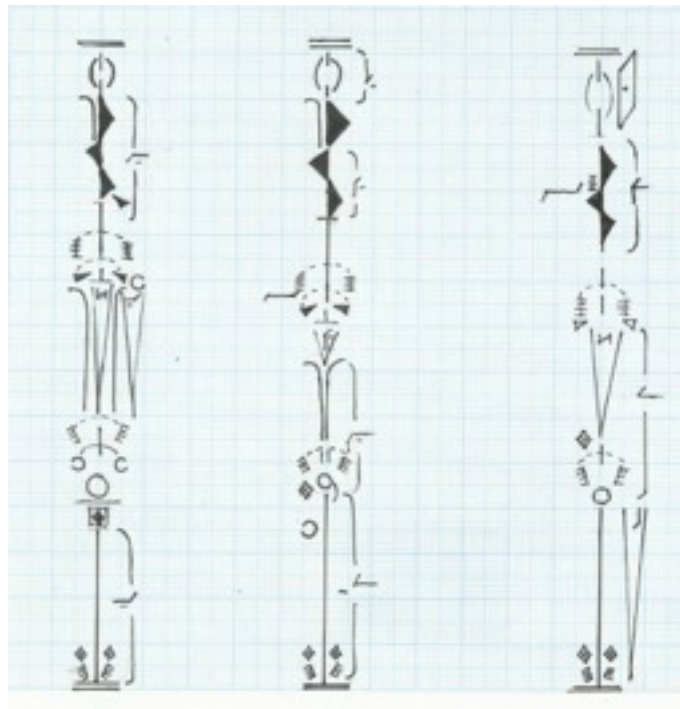


Fig. 5.5 Three performances of the “Nora” entrance (from left to right): Hayley Forskitt, Jill Johnson, Jennifer Fournier

When performed by Johnson on the recording of Ballett Frankfurt (2002b), this short opening phrase seems to summarise her approach to the entire “Nora” solo. Johnson accentuates the soloist’s independence from the others in the scene. She stands out for her strong and quick movement contrasts. For example, her entrance walk is economical and simple, and the opening arm phrase is swift and efficient, as if she aims to travel in the shortest path. Yet, while unfolding her arms strongly (to reach the “V” position), Johnson adds a very brief detail of *shape-flow*, by spreading out her thoracic area very quickly, like a gymnast announcing the beginning of her routine. With this action she commands our attention toward herself. (Most dancers, for example the original Canadian performer Dominique Dumais, articulate the movement more gesturally, by isolating the arms.) Nevertheless, since the movement execution is fast and the pathway of her arms straightforward, Johnson’s port de bras functions as an introduction to the main action —

the very quick subsequent footwork. This small detail from the solo opening also illustrates how Johnson uses her upper body throughout the dance.

Later in the dance Johnson's movements are still *direct*, yet there is an increasing sense of épaulement exploration, which is apparent through her increased postural articulation of the choreographic phrases. There is a strong impression that Johnson's movements throughout the dance originate from various points in her body that are engaged simultaneously.<sup>21</sup> (This is similar to what was noted about Gates's performance in "Tracy", 5.2.) Throughout the dance Johnson continues to draw out strong contrasts in the dynamics. Her postural approach increases the impression of blending the movements, but she sometimes also draws out particularly strong accents on specific musical chords. This may be seen in the start of the solo, where Johnson's major musical stress is on the initial leg action (start of sub-section 2): in the stabbing piqués she applies a very *strong force*, as if to break the floor with her pointe shoes. But, in contrast with this very fast and firm pressing action into the floor, there is also an impression of airiness in her succeeding high and frothy jumps that are interconnected smoothly. Within this brief phrase, the steps are infused with opposing qualities, and the staccato approach is succeeded by the legato. Overall, such a sense of movement texture in Johnson's interpretation in some instances evokes the image of an athlete, and in others personifies an improvising musician.

During the conversation, Johnson explained her process. She spoke about her specific affinity for the "Nora" solo (as she had performed several different solo roles in *the second detail* over the years<sup>22</sup>). She expressed a particular admiration for "the history of the role": "I looked up to Nora Kimball so much and liked all of her dance roles, but this solo is very special and powerful" (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008). For Johnson there was also

a sense of pleasure that stemmed from the music of the solo. She particularly enjoyed the opening with the initial surprise that “Nora” delivers to the viewer, through the dramatic shift between pedestrian moments and the sudden balletic action. “It is all kind of unexpected... she casually walks into it, and then BAM..!” As Johnson explained, there was a sense of power, a feeling of “exploding” on stage with the “thrilling musicality” (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008).

In addition to the feeling of power in the entrance scene, Johnson also enjoyed the virtuosic aspects of the role as a whole: “I loved jumping, and that solo includes many jumps”. Amplifying this effect, as Johnson explains, she introduced a step modification into the solo. With Forsythe’s consent, she turned the opening jump (originally an *entrechat*) into a *tour en l’air* (which she perceived as a traditionally more masculine, athletic step).<sup>23</sup> Equally, Johnson felt that even the slightest qualities in the movement added another facet to the sense of power. For example, a simple sense of lingering on *pointe* induced the feeling of being suspended above the ground: “[Y]ou sort of feel like you are hovering, especially in the beginning, and I liked that feeling” (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008).

All the aspects that Johnson emphasised in this conversation were also observable in her performance. As established previously, there was indeed a clear sense of strong accent at the start (the *piqués*), in contrast with the softness of the upward movements (jumps), and persisting later on in frequent *relevés* and *développés* that can be linked to her feeling of “lingering” above the stage. Due to her powerful movement dynamics, and her disposition — maintaining focus on the frontal area, she appears dominant in the scene. In this performance “Nora” is a clear soloist who takes over the stage in her variation.

In comparison with Johnson, Hayley Forskitt in the 2007 production of the international repertory company (the Norwegian National Ballet), developed another distinctive approach. She followed the lead by the staging expert (Johnson) but also found other aspects of the role to explore in relation to her real-life experience in the role. As with Johnson, the uniqueness of Forskitt's approach begins with her entrance. For example, in the opening walk (1), Forskitt begins to approach us sooner than the other dancers do. She appears very relaxed, walking directly toward the audience with a slight sway in her hips. She very calmly slips into her spot and into the fifth position fast enough to leave herself enough time to savour the moment of stillness. Most dancers do not spend as much time standing still. (Dumais, for example, uses more time for her leisurely walk, and does not wait in the pose too long, but rather immediately launches into the arm action very gesturally.) Forskitt, however, stands on the spot, observing the scene. She even takes a moment to look at and very subtly nod to each of the dancers who join her at her sides.

After indulging in the standing moment, Forskitt unfolds and closes the arms still more slowly than the other dancers do (she uses three musical counts, which is more time than Johnson takes in her performance). She thus continues to give us the impression of aiming to indulge in every moment along the way. This is readily apparent in her action — by initiating the arms slowly, Forskitt simultaneously sets in motion her thoracic area, then powerfully accelerates the arm movement first inward and across. In this action she sustains the backbend with the head and shoulders extending backwards and up, as if taking a very deep breath to hold on to the final note, before bursting into the virtuoso action. Not only does she produce a great contrast by anticipating the strong action with a delicate rubato effect, but she also adds an emotional (perhaps even a brief ecstatic)

moment. Forskitt's detailed approach in sub-section 1 is quite effective and unique. She projects an image of someone enjoying each moment fully. Furthermore, from the beginning we see her relating to the other dancers on stage.

At interview, Forskitt explained her performance in exceptional detail. In the general discussion of the "Nora" solo, Forskitt particularly singled out the walking entrance as an important part of her variation. This is the phrase when the mood is set, as she explained, and in this moment Forskitt felt "powerful": all the dancers exit and it is her moment to take over the stage (Forskitt, interview, 28 April 2011). The opening arm phrase to her represented an anticipation of a high-energy dance where she felt very free, and could "be herself", almost "forgetting" that she was "wearing pointe shoes". Forskitt also explained that this particular film captured her last performance in the run of the ballet, and that on this occasion she especially wanted to take the time and savour each moment of the solo, as this was one of her favourite roles (interview, 28 April 2011). The observed effect of her particular indulgence in the opening phrase may thus be a product of the real-life feeling the dancer had in the moment of performance (rather than of her thinking about a dramatic moment, a story or a character, for example). Equally, reaching arms upward and out (with palms turned toward the ceiling, as if to touch the widest and highest point of the *kinesphere* in a "V" shape), as Forskitt explains, drew on a particular exercise explored with Johnson during the creative process.

Throughout the variation, Forskitt continues with similar qualities, appearing to take pleasure in each movement. She finds opportunities to emphasise various upper body movements by adding some off-balance elements. In sub-section 3, Forskitt particularly emphasises the peripheral areas of her *kinesphere*, venturing far out from the centre, thus



increasing *indirectness*. The oblique movement is already choreographed in the meandering phrase, in the beginning of sub-section 3, when “Nora” dances in unison with two other women. This phrase includes a succession of backward traveling, zig-zagging bouncing arabesques (where the supporting leg works as a spring, with light demi-pliés, as the gesturing leg extends simultaneously). The phrase is repeated three times. After the final arabesque, the dancer ends upstage centre, then switches direction to travel downstage more directly in a succession of chaînés. Now “Nora” is moving in unison with two new female colleagues.

Forskitt’s execution of this sub-section is playful. She seems to enjoy the upstage meandering in particular. While other dancers perform the bouncing arabesques with an upward breath in the front arm, Forskitt surprises us with generous, downward swings, as if testing her balance. This is a larger movement alteration — an arabesque that turns into a penchée, which was not observed as a coaching direction. (Johnson’s staging uses the traditional upward movement, rather than a downward slash through the space in front of the dancer, as can be seen on an excerpt from a rehearsal at the Boston Ballet, 2011.) In the downstage chaîné sequence too, Forskitt amplifies the off-balance approach, by exploring the *transverse kinesphere* through a slight whirling action in the neck and shoulders that adds a wobbly effect to her turns.

The effect of Forskitt’s off-balance modulations in the upper body (including her “ecstatic” *shape-flow* detail in the opening arm phrase) is not only unique and captivating. It also makes a larger point about the ballet as a whole because it implies links between the “Nora” dance and the final solo, “Kate”. As established in 5.1, the concept of “disfocus” that is featured in *The Loss of Small Detail* is not used in *the second detail*. Nevertheless,

the ballet finale — the “Hula” section, features a hypnotic dance of the final soloist, “Kate”, who moves chaotically and barefooted about the stage as if spellbound, thus drawing out a connection with the “disfocused” and here unseen, *The Loss of Small Detail*.<sup>24</sup>

While Forskitt’s approach does not give an overwhelming effect of destabilisation of the balletic aplomb, her increased off-balance, vertiginous approach has an effect of gentle blending of the binaries between these two very different roles. In Forskitt’s interpretation even some direct allusions may be found. For instance, Forskitt’s “Nora’s” downward arm swings in the meandering arabesques (sub-section 3) might remind us of “Kate’s” opening movement — the succession of erratic, downward arm swinging. The elements of Forskitt’s interpretation therefore could be seen as a reference to the somewhat unfocused state that the “Kate” solo represents. In this sense, Forskitt’s approach is of particular interest and unique, as it enhances the links between two major contrasting sections in the ballet. This interpretation could be viewed as an amplification of the dramaturgical arc of the whole ballet, and even as a new illumination of Forsythe’s full two-part work.

Her interview revealed that Forskitt did not intentionally aim for this larger effect. During the conversation, however, she did explain the rationale for the increased off-balance approach in sub-section 3. Forskitt physically demonstrated the whirling movement in the chaîné phrase and verbally clarified that this vertiginous expression was an example of having fun and interpreting the sense of the “groove” that was indicated by Johnson in the rehearsals (when she rehearsed the dancers in *the second detail* to hip-hop music, rather than to Willems’s score, as explained in 3.3). It was thus interesting to observe that the strong effect of an increased off-balance movement execution, which links “Nora” with

“Kate”, was not related, for example, to an imaginary story, but it was nevertheless planned (the aim to express a real-life experience, a sense of fun and experimentation). This can be seen also as another example of connecting the performance and the back-stage creative process.

Although Forskitt did not necessarily foresee links between “Nora” and the other solos, she did emphasise the importance of differences among sub-sections in the variation. As she explained, the solo (sub-sections 1-3) and the duet (sub-section 4) have very different qualities. The solo to her represented an expression of “freedom” to be herself and an enjoyment of occasional moments of being in unison with others. The partnering dance (sub-section 4), however, fully shifts toward the theme of dancers “trusting each other” (Forskitt, interview, 28 April 2011). The movement dynamics, as she explained, changes, as the woman begins to work with her partner to accent the horizontal, oppositional forces, expressed as “pulling and pushing” each other.

Although she felt different degrees of partnership, Forskitt’s accentuation of the social aspects stands out as another particularly strong feature of her overall performance in “Nora”. As already established, in the opening (sub-section 1), she directly acknowledges the two dancers at her sides. (Dumais, Johnson and Fournier, for example, only look toward the audience, more or less directly.) In sub-section 3, Forskitt is the only dancer who again looks to see where the dancers around her are positioned (as if checking for synchronicity). Although brief, several details such as these performances amplify the sense of the soloist’s partnership with the ensemble. In the interview, Forskitt explains that glancing toward the two dancers in the opening phrase was fully her idea (“I added the look toward them”), as she felt an impulse to signal an invitation to the companions for the

journey. (“Come on girls, here we go!” was how Forskitt narrated the moment in our conversation.) In the later part of the variation, she explains that her pleasure in performing the solo was further amplified by the moments when she felt in unison with the two teammates around her (Forskitt, interview, 28 April 2011). Due to her ideas, Forskitt’s performance particularly amplified the possibility to express the sense of a community in the ballet.

Forskitt’s contribution is thus manifold. She increases the sense that “Nora” is part of the group, and her rubato and small additions fill the variation with movement and leave an impression of legato, but also project her enjoyment in each moment. Her approach also alerts the viewer to the possible connections between “Nora” and other sections and creates an interesting arc in the ballet. Through small details Forskitt communicates a kind of documentary information — the feeling of freedom to be herself (and “forgetting” that she is on stage, “in pointe shoes”). Having fun performing the movement material indeed gave her freedom to make smaller and larger modifications (as in sub-section 3). Additionally, while she did not mention the *épaulement* as the system of movement, it can be seen that Forskitt used her training background (the Royal Ballet School), which she felt gave her an ability to develop the upper body (Forskitt, interview, 28 April 2011). Her performance exemplifies Caspersen’s point about dancers playing “with the material, bringing all of their skill, insight, and experience to bring it alive” (Caspersen, email correspondence, 14 March 2011).

In comparison, two other repertory company dancers in the current production of the National Ballet of Canada brought out particular qualities of their own. Dumais and Xiao Nan Yu, similarly to the previous examples of Johnson and Forskitt, also amplified the

sense of *free* actions, and increased the impression of risk by the frequent use of off-balance movement. In the case of Yu, it was particularly interesting to observe her approach in sub-sections 2 and 3, where she seemed to find many opportunities to explore the edges of her *kinesphere*. But, unlike Forskitt who explored a transverse and peripheral *kinesphere* predominantly through her upper body, Yu's off-balance movements are those that are initiated through her leg actions. For example, throughout the dance, Yu performs battements as if she is governed by a centrifugal force, playing with various possibilities to destabilise the centre, and yet not lose control. In the finale of sub-section 3, Yu performs very high side and front leg kicks forcefully and as a reaction the rest of the body is pulled along off-centre. But, this seemingly care-free approach is juxtaposed with very centred pirouettes, where she remains firmly on-balance, with precise endings in fifth position and facing the audience. The exacting turns not only remind the spectator of Yu's more habitual performing style, but also render her off-balance movements ludic. This impression of playful spontaneity is increased by Yu's occasional smiling expressions, as if she is showing us her enjoyment and pleasure in risk taking and the unencumbered dancing style.

Unlike Forskitt and Johnson, in her interview Yu (23 October 2009) did not emphasise her enjoyment in the performance of "Nora" role as much as she spoke about the solo as an opportunity to break the mould, and to show the diversity of her performing style. Yu described how her ballet school training was strict and "disciplined"<sup>25</sup>. Consequently, she felt that this training had shaped her performing style. Yu expressed that she sometimes felt typecast as one of the "very classical" dancers in the Canadian company, most often selected for the noble roles.<sup>26</sup> For Yu, "Nora" thus represented a very welcome opportunity for "transformation" and a departure from the types of roles she usually embodies:

With *the second detail*, I really know I can show-off the area of my body that classical works would never allow me to show. For example, I can turn to show the back of my neck... I can play in certain ways that classical repertory would never allow me to... For me it [*the second detail*] was such a transformation, like I had to break that form. I could dance without being so proper... It was so much fun being so different... Just free to let loose (Yu, interview, 23 October 2009).

This approach may explain the observed off-balance leg kicks, juxtaposed with classically “proper” execution of steps (precise pirouettes). Similarly to Bull in Balanchine’s “Bransle Gay” (4.5), Yu in her performance seems to provide a kind of documentary comment, addressing perceptions about her performing style (feeling typecast), and about her training background. Furthermore, it was interesting to learn that with this factual commentary Yu also imagined a fictional situation and a “character” in her abstract roles. As she explains, in the plotless ballets, “I tell myself a little story to guide me through” (Yu, interview, 23 October, 2009). In the case of “Nora”, Yu’s story was of a young girl who has fun when she does things that are out of character (“going to the rock concert, instead of to the classical recital”). In Yu’s imagination the “girl” was somewhat “wild” and someone who gets “all over the place” but always remains a part of the group and equal to all others on stage (Yu, interview, 23 October 2009).

Relationships with others in Yu’s performance, however, appeared different from Forskitt’s. The effect of her performance was closer to Johnson’s apparent independence from the group. Due to her forceful off-balance actions Yu also appeared more assertive than Forskitt, and due to her strong accents there was a sense that she stood out more strongly from the other dancers. In this sense, Yu’s imagined “story” thus most obviously related to the issue of the soloist’s “double challenge” as Konvalina noted: a need to highlight individuality yet still firmly remain a member of the group.

In comparison with the approaches discussed so far, one more performance should be mentioned — Jennifer Fournier’s “Nora” was very different from all others. In contrast with the three different expressions of “freedom” in the previous examples, Fournier’s performance left an impression of introversion, discipline and restraint. Throughout the solo, Fournier’s *kinesphere* is more modest and central than in the performances of the other dancers. The large movements, such as battements, are also more controlled. Throughout the variation these restrained movements are juxtaposed with the *strong* jumps and mildly off-balance turns. For example, in sub-section 3, where the other dancers performed movements off-balance (for example, the chaîné phrase), Fournier’s movements are *bound*, although her développés and battements are occasionally surprisingly quick and forceful. The overall staccato phrasing is softened, however, as Fournier develops a bounce in the movement (which is similar to Johnson’s postural approach). The predominant effect, however, is that Fournier mostly stays on-balance, as if to accentuate the sense of composure, rather than thriving on risks.

Fournier also shows us what is difficult in her dancing. For example, whenever she kicks her leg high, she slightly bends her head away from it, as if to shelter herself even from her own action. Her facial expression throughout the variation remains solemn and withdrawn and she does not seem to relate directly to the other female dancers. Overall, the contributions by Fournier shade the “Nora” variation with restraint and vulnerability. Fournier also seems to exude a more *flexible* attitude toward the space and this impression of remoteness is amplified in her gaze: she seems to look through the audience, and not at it or at her peers. This combination of projecting self-control and strength, and at the same time appearing distant, brought out an impression of non-conformity. This portrayal of “Nora” depicts a more isolated and perhaps vulnerable figure in the ballet. This is very

different from the sense of power in Johnson's approach, and fun and risk observed in Yu's performance, and particularly contrasting to the sense of spontaneity and partnership with others projected by Forskitt.

All these effects observed in Fournier's movement relate quite literally to what she saw in the role and explained in the interview. In her own way, similarly to Yu, Fournier implicitly commented upon her training through her approach. Unlike Yu, however, she was not using opportunities to subvert it, but rather to highlight its values. As she explains, Fournier was taught not to suppress her physical efforts and challenges, as Canada's National Ballet School did not place a great emphasis on the sense of effortlessness in the execution of movement (that she sees in some other styles of training, for example in the Vaganova method).

The effort wasn't something we were trying to mask. Which was very different, in comparison to my later colleagues... whose training was very much always about "masking the effort". And I was never raised like that (Fournier, interview, 27 April 2011).

Fournier also explained that she aimed to project a more modest persona, approaching the role with restraint. She felt that Forsythe's roles could be explored with abandon (as he combines so many different movement styles, even "street" dance), but his style can also be performed in a gentler, calmer and "more classical" manner, which is the approach that she favoured (Fournier, interview, 27 April 2011).

This thinking behind the movement could therefore explain Fournier's use of a confined and more central *kinesphere*. The vulnerability that I noticed, however, was one impression from the spectator's perspective that I shared with Fournier, which she was unaware of. (While I noted a sense of timidity in her performance, Fournier in the interview was very



outspoken, has articulated many new points and shared many details about her dancing approach in this and other roles.) Overall, in her approach to “Nora” Fournier developed a very different interpretation from other dancers. She partly communicated the values that she considers a part of her training background, and she equally projected interesting qualities of which she was not aware (vulnerability). In this sense, her contribution combines both intentional and unplanned effects (which is a similar quality to Rodriguez’s contribution in “Sanguinic”, 4.3). In the social aspects, Fournier’s interpretation is more related to Johnson’s sense of independence from others in the group, but the impression was one of control, rather than of experimentation.

The analysis of the dancers in the “Nora” variation revealed a wide range of approaches that bring out some new points. Although all different, I would argue that the approaches discussed here represented the different “discursive” practices that Forsythe hoped for. Some performers amplified the theme of “community” (particularly Forskitt) while others appeared as isolated figures (Fournier for instance). As expected, Johnson, as a dancer who performed the role in Forsythe’s resident company, most clearly expressed the interrogation of *épaulement* as a complex system, by exploring alternative body points to initiate and perform the movement.

The same material also motivated the dancers to think of various aspects of the role. Forskitt’s performance (perhaps unintentionally) was the most detailed one and it created a particular sense of arc in the ballet, drawing upon her own feelings in the moment of performance. This solo also showed that most dancers had a perception of being allowed a great freedom in the work. Also, as Caspersen indicated, the dancers within Forsythe material can “work in individual ways” and the results therefore may be “radically

different” (as cited on p. 186). Since this is an effect found in all performances observed, it may be asserted that the significant differences in the dancers’ interpretations are the result of the nature of the material that allows bolder contributions.

#### 5.4 *STEPTEXT* (1985)<sup>27</sup>

After a range of contributions observed in two solos from *the second detail*, it is of interest to explore different choreography from the same period. As a chamber work for four dancers (one woman and three men) *Steptext* is very interesting in juxtaposition with an ensemble piece such as *the second detail*. The choreography is also created by using a very different musical score from many of those in Ballett Frankfurt’s “ballet-ballets”, which are dominated by electronic and contemporary music. In *Steptext*, following the duets in the second act of the *Artifact*, Forsythe uses Bach’s *Partita No.2 BWV1004 in D minor*, *Chaconne* (performed by Nathan Milstein).

*Steptext* was the earliest ballet that Forsythe created for an international repertory company after he became the director of Ballett Frankfurt. It was commissioned by Italian Aterballetto, and the core dance material is adapted from the second act of the full-evening *Artifact* (created within Ballett Frankfurt only months earlier).<sup>28</sup> As Forsythe explained in his own words, the core of *Steptext* emerged through “a compression of the two pas de deux” from the second part of *Artifact* “into one” (Sadler’s Wells Screen, 2010, online). Therefore, unlike in the case of *the second detail* where Forsythe with his own dancers expanded the questions that he had found during his collaboration with the Canadian troupe, *Steptext* represents the opposite process: taking the choreographic themes from a

larger *Artifact* to further explore particular details, or a narrower set of issues, with a different cultural group.

Similarly to his other ballets from the period, in *Steptext* Forsythe plays with the spectator's expectations. The dance begins with the exposed movement on the open stage as the audience enters. As discussed in MacGibbon's 1997 documentary of The Royal Ballet performance, especially during the early days of *Steptext* in the 1980s and 1990s when it was performed in the repertory companies, there was a sense of provocation and surprise. The ballet starts developing through a succession of improvisational solos in pedestrian style, performed by one dancer at a time, in silence. During these predominantly gesturing sections, fragments of the Bach score are occasionally sounded, only several bars at a time. (Across different productions the sudden bursts of sound do not have consistent timing in each performance and, as observed on the Royal Ballet's 1996 film, the sound is played at the cues given by the stage manager.<sup>29</sup>) Finally, at the onset of the continual music, the final (female) solo turns into a duet as the male partner joins the woman. This moment marks the beginning of the vertiginous partnering segments, where the four performers exchange places and create various couplings.

Similarly to the disruption of sound, throughout the performance there are sporadic (longer and shorter) periods of darkness that disturb the continuity of the viewing experience. The intention, it seems however, is not to allow that the interruptions of sound and light disturb the flow of the dance. The impression is that the movement unfolds whether we see it or not (the sound of a dancer's steps may be heard on some recordings), as if Forsythe wants to send us a message about the enduring presence of dance. The choreographer's programme note explains that *Steptext*

...suspends the major and incidental procedural mechanisms of performance that have traditionally determined the structure of theatrical representation. The resulting series of dislocated musical, scenographic and danced suspensions creates a mood of changed narrative (Forsythe, in Ballett Frankfurt, 2002).

Forsythe thus indicates a defragmentation of a dramaturgical composition. Similarly to other dances from this repertory, *Steptext* is dance without a linear narrative, although (perhaps similarly to Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments*) some viewers may read into the relationships between the four figures. Some viewers also find underlying ideological meanings in the work, as is expressed for example in the analysis of dance historian Helena Hammond (2012) who observed *Steptext* as Forsythe's commentary on the politics of theatres as traditional institutions in which ballet is presented.<sup>30</sup>

In his recent public statements, Forsythe indicated that the core theme of *Steptext* is an expression of a voracious desire to dance. This theme is embodied in the role of the ballerina:

I would say the ballerina in the piece sort of embodies this incredible desire to dance. To dance to the limits of your abilities. ... I think if you go there, and certainly some dancers do go there, there is something waiting there for you — transcendence. I don't know whether the audience notices or not, but I think the performer experiences it. And I think the audiences do experience it when the dancer goes that far (Forsythe in Sadler's Wells Screen, 2010, online).

Perhaps similarly to the "Second pas de trois" in *Agon*, there is an element of competition in the piece as the men's mission, according to the choreographer, is to equal this "incredible desire to dance" of the ballerina. The male partners, as Forsythe explains, have to want "every single thing that she [the ballerina] has to do, every position, every task", "even more than her" (Sadler's Wells Screen, 2010, online).

While the dancer's relationship to the theme of the insatiable desire to dance was one of the starting points of this analysis, similarly to the case of *the second detail* the aim is not to measure the accuracy of the performer's contribution in relation to the concepts put forth publicly by the choreographer. His aforementioned statements about the ballet are recent (the citations above were recorded nearly fifteen years after the staging of *Steptext* in the Royal Ballet). As with *the second detail*, where the spectators had a set of references (as explained on p. 177, the audience could refer to Bierce's story), Forsythe's recent public statements may have been directed at viewers, but not necessarily at performers. It is not certain whether the idea of the "insatiable desire to dance", that Forsythe explains above, was included in the working process with the dancers.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, as Caspersen reminds us (cited 5.0), Forsythe may not like to communicate any meanings as definitive.

Unlike in the previous examples, the aim in this section is not to juxtapose the contributions of the dancers from the resident and repertory company cultures in the same role in *Steptext*. In this case, the dancers from the Forsythe resident company and the repertory company dancers did not perform identical material, although both groups performed the movement material from the duets. Nevertheless, after the analysis of such cultural influences in *the second detail*, the female solo from *Steptext* was found useful as a rare opportunity to observe a ballet dancer from an international repertory company in a longer improvised section.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the interruptions of sound and light in *Steptext*, it was felt, provide a unique opportunity to observe and discuss the dancers' response to such untraditional performing environment in ballet.

### 5.5 THE FEMALE SOLO IN *STEPTEXT*

The woman's solo is the final dance in a succession of improvisational dances in the beginning of the ballet. This solo lasts about one minute, or slightly longer, depending on different productions and even different evenings.<sup>33</sup> Due to its unique structure, the woman's solo in *Steptext* is not divided into sub-sections for the purpose of clarity. As the woman performs almost entirely in silence, and the flow of movements does not seem to shift significantly at any point, this solo is discussed as one unit.

The key overall movement qualities in the solo include the following:

- the dance is composed of arm movements: geometrical, angular gesturing (variously initiated in shoulders, elbows, wrists);
- dominant *sagittal* plane (some performers include occasional *vertical* movements, for example shifting an arm upwards or downwards);
- the movements are performed in a confined space (*bound*);
- the head is sometimes coordinated with arm actions; most of the time, however, the dancer gazes directly at the audience;
- the lower body rests (after she reaches the position, the ballerina remains stationary for the duration of the solo, facing the audience frontally).

The analysis is based mainly on two recordings that capture performances by Deborah Bull, who was one of two dancers cast by Forsythe in the Royal Ballet production (along with Sylvie Guillem). In the Royal Ballet, since its premiere in April 1995, the ballet was performed often; it was featured on the programme of almost every season between 1995-1999 (see Royal Opera House Collections Online).

COMPANY	DANCER	INTERVIEW	RECORDING
The Royal Ballet	Deborah Bull	Telephone interviews, 17 May 2011, 29 June 2011.	The Royal Ballet (1996) MacGibbon 1997
Mariinsky Ballet	Yekatarina Kondaurova	n/a	Mariinsky Ballet, 2009, online
National Ballet of Cuba	Gladys Acosta	n/a	National Ballet of Cuba, 2009, online

Fig. 5.6 *Steptext* — the female solo

Two films form the main focus of the analysis: an earlier unpublished archival recording (available from the Video Archive of the Royal Opera House Collections, The Royal Ballet 1996), and a BBC2 telecast recorded a year later (MacGibbon, 1997). As additional sources, two more excerpts of the female solo provided useful information (a recording of the telecast of the National Ballet of Cuba production, as well as an excerpt from the Mariinsky Ballet production). A digital excerpt provided by Caspersen, showing her own performances of the duet material from *Artifact*, provided a better understanding of the Ballett Frankfurt's performance style in the duet material. Caspersen and Bull were interviewed. While the former aided in a better overall understanding of *Artifact* and its processes <sup>34</sup> useful for understanding the *Steptext*, the latter focused on the details of her own performing experiences, including the solo.

When *Steptext* opens in silence, the viewer witnesses the succession of two short male improvisational solos. After the second man exits the stage, the ballerina comes out, walking towards the audience from the left wing. She approaches her spot (downstage left), and positions herself frontally facing the spectators. In silence, she starts a sequence of arm gesturing. Throughout the solo, her arms describe angular lines, remaining in a fairly confined *kinesphere*, mainly reaching from lower pelvis to her eye level. The bound

movements alternate between *successive* and *sequential* combinations, twisting the wrists and elbows to describe horizontal and vertical lines. Sometimes the woman's fists are clenched and she rolls or ticks the wrists together. The frontal position and the gaze straight out towards the audience implies a form of communication, as if the woman is gesturing a cryptic message to the viewer. As explained earlier, in the midst of the woman's gesturing, the silence is interrupted with a few spare sounds of the music.

Caspersen explains that the idea of gestural communication, of "giving the signs", originates with the character of "the mud woman in *Artifact*" (officially called the "Other Person"). These gestures however are not similar to mime, as they are not elucidating a specific linear story:

They are a language of form and dynamic. Form transmitting thought. In *Steptext*, they are one way that she speaks to the three men with whom she is in these complicated relationships (Caspersen, email correspondence, 14 March 2011).

In one of his interviews, Forsythe clarifies that the gestural sequence in fact represents an exploration of the basic connections in *épaulement*.

The ballerina... is doing all the possible relationships of hand in *épaulement*. Sometimes though the fists are closed, so the only difference is that you rather close the hand. And so she is trying to think, this angle, that angle — there is that [gesturing the arm movements in a fast flow while speaking], like that. So she is sort of a catalogue of positions. And that's what she communicates with the boys. It ends up looking gestural, like a signal (Forsythe, in *Sadler's Wells Screen*, 2010, online).

It is not clear whether the theme of *épaulement* in this solo was explored with all dancers. Similarly, it is not imperative to know about the semiology of the "mud woman" from *Artifact*. It is also interesting to observe that the range of movements used in this improvised section seems very similar in the rendition of dancers observed on the film. All



performers describe angular shapes, and there may be moments where the movements are reminiscent of the port de bras transposed into the vectorial relationships of the smaller parts of the limbs, such as angles of elbows and forearms, that in certain combinations may relate to the images of épaulé positions. There are also many movements that do not seem to refer to épaulement at all: the stirring action of the wrists (with the arms en bas) or twisting the forearms on a horizontal plane, in parallel, as seen in Bull's performances in 1996 and 1997, and also on Acosta's 2009 film.

The major differences between the various approaches are not in the range of gestures, but in their effort qualities. Kondaurova uses a narrower, and more central *kinesphere*. Her gesturing involves a sense of *shape-flow*, as she employs her thoracic area to gently expand, rise and sink simultaneously with the arm movements. Acosta, for example, performs more oblique movements, executing them very quickly and in close succession. She gives an impression of rushing to finish the whole "catalogue" of movements she has envisioned to show us. If this is her sign language, the impression is that she speaks very fast, and the sense of free, vernacular action is enhanced and the *kinesphere* expanded. There is no impression that she is thinking about each succeeding step ahead of time; the gestures just pour out of her body.

Bull, however, projects a sense of careful approach, and quiet concentration. These are qualities that may be a part of her ballet culture and rooted in her training background, which nourished clarity and precision in performance.<sup>35</sup> Her gestures have defined beginnings and endings, the use of the *kinesphere* is more modest, and her pace of movement seems more equally measured than in the other two performers' renditions. As a classically trained ballerina whose classes in the Royal Ballet School arguably did not

allow for much improvisation, Bull explained in her interview (17 May 2011) that *Steptext* was a particularly valuable experience and a very special role for her, due to the “remarkable opportunity to rehearse it for six weeks with Forsythe”<sup>36</sup>. Similarly to Lamy’s account of the “Tracy” solo (5.2), there was a sense of particular motivation drawn from the direct work with the choreographer in the studio.

In terms of the directions for structured improvisation, Bull explained that there was not much discussion about the structure of the sequence:

In the little improv section, no, I don’t recall him ever making much comment... I’m sure I would have asked for more detail. And the only thing that was ever really said [by Forsythe or Caspersen, in the studio] was that you are in a way describing the edges of a box. It was like a cardboard box in front of you, and you’re describing its angles and its spaces, its uprights and its verticals... (Bull, interview, 17 May 2011).

While it is plausible that the image of “the box” may relate to Laban’s *Choreutic* principle of the cube and may in this sense relate to the geometry of ballet épaulement, it is evident that the dancer did not work on developing the box imagery into an analysis of the balletic codified movement.

The improvisational base of the solo makes the observation of different performances by the same dancer very interesting. Two of Bull’s recordings that capture two events, a year apart, show some, but not profound changes. The earlier recording (The Royal Ballet, 1996) shows Bull approaching the arm movements with a looser quality. The movements are also softer, less angular as Bull often bends her elbows and wrists softly, particularly when she switches from bent upward arms into the lower position, or when she performs fluid beating and stirring wrist actions. In her later tape, there is an increased impression of staccato phrasing; there are frequent angular shapes, but also more sudden accents. For

example, there are some isolated, simultaneous actions of two body parts as accents (as when, about twelve seconds into the solo, Bull turns her head toward the shoulders and simultaneously opens the shoulder and the elbow). The overall impression is that there are some new “steps” in the later film, but the greater difference is in the degree of control. The movement qualities in the first performance could be summarised as *light, quick* and *indirect*, while the later one, with its shorter, more isolated movements also includes greater contrasts of speed, and increased inclusion of *bound* movements (the *light touch* is maintained).


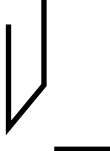
DEBORAH BULL, LATER RECORDING 1997	DEBORAH BULL, EARLIER RECORDING 1996
 <p><i>Bound, light, fluctuates between sudden and sustained.</i></p>	 <p>Frequent <i>quick</i> movement, <i>light, flexible</i>. Fluctuates between <i>free</i> and <i>bound</i>.</p>

Fig.5.7 Overall effort qualities in two performances by Deborah Bull

These key differences in the combinations of *effort* qualities observed in the solo (as shown on fig. 5.7) also resonate with the rest of Bull’s performance in the ballet. In two main duets, in particular, Bull’s earlier recording involves some increased moments of unrestrained action, which in the context of partnering sections amplify the dramatic effect. For example, at the end of her first partnering segment (with Adam Cooper), another dancer (Peter Abegglen) approaches the pair and pulls the woman by the arm toward himself (and out of her arabesque penchée). Bull responds as if surprised: her balance is

disturbed, and she quickly shifts to adjust and turns her head in reaction. The impression is that the moment is not rehearsed, or that the dancer did not anticipate that something like this would happen — at that moment projecting a certain vulnerability and defensiveness. But, on the second film (*The Royal Ballet*, 1997) her interpretation does not display many moments like this one. The appearance of the third man seems to be anticipated, and the sense of control is not lost. This tension between observing and expressing the contrast, while at the same time maintaining the sense of restraint, seems to be a major aspect of Bull's contribution in the later performance.

In these duet sections, there is a potential to develop a sense of a story through the interpretation. Bull, through her generally more restrained approach, does not project a sense of an overt story, even in the earlier film which shows more abandon. As Bull explains, the movement filled with the qualities of “push and pull”, as these duets are, makes it “very hard not to imagine that it is about relationships” (Bull, interview, 17 May 2011). Nonetheless, Bull underscores the importance of cautiousness because in this type of material there is a danger of pushing the expression too far towards a story. There is an impetus to maintain “elegance”:

This is a baroque dance. And there are particular sections... chassés forward with the arms changing while you're holding your partner's both hands... He [Forsythe] talked about the sense of a baroque dance, partnered dance (Bull, interview, 29 June 2011).

Similarly to Fournier in *the second detail's* “Nora” interpretation, Bull believed that the dancer should exercise restraint and not suggest more than there is in the movement itself:

And this is the difficulty with Forsythe work, as I think it's too easy to make it into a... not quite a drama, but sort of a “sassy lady story”... And of course the music has its own drama... And I think one almost always has to avoid or pull back from placing a narrative on top of that choreography, because you have that pulling, dramatic music... paired with that “push-me, pull-you” choreography. Well it could turn into a domestic drama, couldn't it?... And I think the way I

retracted from that was to go deeper, and deeper and deeper into the movement. And that gave it this particular inward focus (Bull, interview, 17 May 2011).

The difference between the two performances in the duet sections is partly explained by the influence of her different partners. With the earlier partner (Cooper), Bull seemed freer to respond and more willing to take risks. While her later performance (with Trevitt) projects a strong overall sense of control (*bound*) in the solo and duet, her duet with Cooper develops an impression of crescendo or a kind of arc of her character as the work unfolds. In the interview, Bull acknowledged that her relationship with Cooper, in particular, had an impact on her different performances, because of his ability to “adapt himself very effectively” to both his partner’s “physical” as well as “emotional, intellectual style”. “So, he becomes almost like a mirror of yourself. So, I always felt empowered to be brave and a bit different” (Bull, interview, 29 June 2011).

The trajectory of the role in *Stext* over time, however, is not as dramatic for Bull in the solo. Bull explained that there was no particular intention to introduce major changes: “I don’t recall ever making a revolutionary change. It was much more evolutionary”. This applied to the duets, but also to the solo where, as she explains, she enjoyed the absence of sound:

I got caught up with the absence of music. I think whenever a dancer moves, there is always rhythm... If you looked at the films of me on several performances, you’d probably find that the dynamic of what I did, and the particular phrasing of ticking the fists and the extended arm, and around — that it probably fell into some kind of patterns, because as you do that more and more, you feel drawn to a particular sequence. But the dynamics of doing it were very similar. So I think that I was creating almost a rhythmic, not a soundtrack, but a rhythmic track within my body and my head, which was accompanying that (Bull, interview, 17 May 2011).

The impressions from my movement analysis completely correlated to Bull's own impression about her dance, as well as to her attitude toward introducing changes. As the movement analysis demonstrates, Bull felt the same as I did from the spectator's perspective in thinking that in her later performances the impression of set movement patterns and diminished experimentation is increased. Regarding the disruption of production elements (light and sound), while she did not comment upon the changes in light, it was interesting to hear Bull's concept of the "rhythmic track" in silence in the above quote. This concept reminded me of the conversation I had earlier with Johnson who explained her own method of an "internal metronome" in various soundless performances in Forsythe's choreography.

In silence you kind of keep the same meter going. It's like an internal metronome. An internal rhythm. And actually that's something that I like to teach, just that internal musicality... to have that same feeling ... your internal drive, rather than it just being empty. That you're still kind of keeping that same beat going... [sings]... So, when the music starts up again, you're right on that meter (Johnson, 30 December 2008).

Even though the two ideas seem to resonate, there is nonetheless a significant difference between these approaches. Johnson's concept of extending the same musical pulse in silence was not part of Bull's process. As Bull explains in the interview, the silent solo was truly about silence for her. She did not attempt to hear anything, or to refer to the [absent] music cognitively and her movement flow did not relate to the imagined sound. She concentrated on the flow of movement and on the execution of arm gestures in her own time. Even when the occasional sound cues emerged, Bull continued with movements and "pretty much ignored them [the short sound occurrences]... I just knew that there were so many of them before the partner was going to come on" (Bull, interview, 17 May 2011). While Johnson maintained the same dynamics in silences by referring cognitively to the

musical pulse, Bull found a difference between the silence that contained staccato qualities (in the solo) and in the legato (in the duet to Bach's music).

I think the main difference is the presence of music... Because from the beginning of that first silent section, the movement is very percussive. And the minute the music starts, the movement becomes extremely, I want to say lyrical, even though that's not what we normally mean by lyrical, but it becomes extremely full and rounded — and like the strings — legato... Even though it's not legato, there's something about it, it's pulled out... chewy, elastic and irreverent (Bull, interview, 17 May 2011).

Different processes in the segments of silence in Forsythe's work are of interest.<sup>37</sup> Bull's idea about the contrast between the silence (staccato) and sound (legato) was not applied to the solo where she "ignored" the short elements of sound, but rather this approach was related to *Steptext* overall. As she explains, Bull did not respond to these brief sounds and was relaxed about the overall timing of the solo and not knowing the sound cues. ("You didn't wait for them because you knew they would come, and you knew they would come so they didn't surprise you".) Her main cue was when her partner approached her, as this signalled that a major change was about to occur (from silence to music, from the solo into the duet). This was a sign that she should enter the preparatory pose (wide fourth position facing the right wing) for the beginning of the duet:

The impulse to stop came from the next dancer coming on, who would stand behind me and virtually say "stop". So, the end-point, was not set by me. The start point was set, and of course it's a ballet that starts with the curtain up... At different times I think we did in different ways, but from what I remember is that the audience is possibly still coming in... So you have to choose a moment to start. And I always found that particularly interesting. That ability that dancers can have, to draw attention to themselves simply by standing. Actually, you were more likely to get the focus on you by standing still, than... to move (Bull, interview, 17 May 2011).

In reference to this idea about the relationship with the audience, it is useful to note that Bull seems to maintain the same connection with the audience on both films. Her gaze

related to the overall impression of restraint and concentration. There is a sense of her thinking through the movement sequences. The pace is measured and the gaze (while straight towards the viewer) seems pensive and not really related to us — as if looking through, or above, and not at the viewer.

Since improvisation is not a typical tool for traditionally trained ballet dancers, it is plausible that the performer's comfort level may be one of the influential factors here. As journalist Stewart Sweeney records, Bull did convey that the un-choreographed opening of *Steptext* represented for her personally “one of the most nerve-wracking experiences she has ever endured on stage” (1998, online). (Other ballet dancers from the repertory companies also express anxiety about improvising. For example, the National Ballet of Canada's Hodkinson also explained that she found improvisation very difficult, interview 23 October 2009.) But, while the level of comfort with improvisation is one possible factor, it was more interesting to find out that the impression I gained from viewing the performances again very closely correlated with Bull's thinking about the solo:

I think that non-narrative roles are a much more internalised journey than narrative ballets, because the key to the communication in a non-narrative ballet is absolutely the movement. If you don't get the movement right, then you don't stand a chance of getting whatever meaning or impact across. And so there is a certain focus inwards. That feels a bit safer, a bit like looking away... you feel like you're closing the world off for a little bit. I think there's a value to doing that. Which isn't to say that you don't dance outward — you have to. But you have to focus very, very much on the movement itself. And I think I found that introversion very well aligned with the way that I like to work (Bull, interview, 17 May 2011).

The silence and the sequence of pure movement thus could be seen as a place where Bull could retreat into herself and relax. As she explained, there was a sense of power, the ability to select her timing, to choose the moment to begin. Apparently, this concept of introversion is also related to her overall feeling about abstract roles. As she finds, the



process in such roles is less performative, perhaps similar to non-theatrical experiences: “I very much enjoy an introverted way of working — focusing on something, very concentrated, being alone... That’s why I love writing so much. And I think that a non-narrative ballet is a bit like writing” (Bull, interview, 17 May 2011).

Bull’s interpretation shows us how minimal aspects and modifications in the interpretation in the female solo in *Steptext* may draw the viewer’s attention to the very fine details of a performer’s approach, but also that such details may reveal the performer’s wider thinking about performing a particular type of work. This approach seems different from that of a dancer communicating a narrative about herself (as I found in several other performances, including Bull’s interpretation of *Agon*, 4.5). This point will be revisited in Chapter 6.

Bull’s performances in *Steptext* also show how the dancer may build the dramatic arc of the role, without planning it. Her performances could be seen as portraits of a woman who starts from a contemplative state and, due to the relationship with different partners, builds up toward more or less dramatic resolution. In this sense, her earlier performance somewhat increased the dramatic aspects. One year later, Bull seemed to favour particular movement patterns in her solo, continuing with a kind of meditative, retreated personal experience. Her duet with a new partner seemed to build upon this calm beginning — as a woman finding herself in the midst of drama, she managed to come out of it unruffled, maintaining the impression of being in control throughout. In this sense, these two interpretations shade the female role in *Steptext* differently and may leave the viewer with a somewhat different impression about the meaning of the work. The two approaches, therefore, are equally interesting and show the complex possibilities that exist for one dancer in the same work over time. As Bull summarises, the complexity of the dancer’s

experience on and off-stage, as well as the prolonged relationship with the same choreographic material, all contribute to the result that the viewer witnesses (Bull, interview, 17 May 2011). This point reminds us again about the importance of the dancer's habitus (discussed in 3.0).

## 5.6 FORSYTHE EXAMPLES - A SUMMARY

The examples analysed in the Forsythe case study reveal the range of possibilities that exists in his leotard ballets, for dancers from different company cultures. In some cases (for example, in *Steptext*), due to Forsythe's distinct explorations with different performing cultures, it was more difficult to draw parallels between dancers from resident and repertory companies. Nevertheless some important aspects could still be usefully juxtaposed — for instance, the exploration of sound and silence which was observed in the processes of Johnson and Bull (5.4).

Overall, Forsythe's dancers, Gates and Johnson, illuminated through movement the exploration of *épaulement*, explained by Caspersen as one of the core performing inquiries in *the second detail* (5.2 and 5.3). Forsythe's dancers also felt freedom to act assertively. Johnson, as she explained, changed the step in the "Nora" variation because she greatly enjoyed jumping. Repertory company dancers, who may not engage completely with the extensive formal exploration of movement principles within the body, evidently have found their own discourses. While some dancers explored imagery and fictional personalities and stories (Lamy in "Tracy" and Yu in "Nora"), many others related their interpretations of the dance to the aspects of their personal life. In particular, Forskitt,

Johnson (in “Nora”) and Bull (in *Steptext*) conveyed something of their own experiences and feelings about the particular roles.

Many dancers felt free to explore the movement and concepts in their roles, bringing their own imprints. This impression that Forsythe’s material induces some very personal ideas in performance was one aspect that stood out in this chapter, even more overwhelmingly than in Balanchine’s examples. Although some dancers (similarly to Balanchine’s roles) had a clear sense of the boundaries (for example, Lamy, 5.2), many dancers in this chapter expressed an impression that they can “be themselves” in Forsythe’s roles, which meant different things for different performers. Some, it was felt, conveyed particular real-life commentaries, personal narratives of sorts, as it will be discussed further in the next chapter (6). Even for those performers like Lamy and Yu, who engaged in imaginary fictional concepts, there was an aspect of performance that was non-fictional. (Yu commented upon her training, and Lamy expressed her versatility as a performer.)

Similarly to what was demonstrated in Balanchine’s examples in Chapter 4, the analysis of Forsythe solos also showed that the small details, which may be noted in the spare aesthetic of leotard ballets, may actually indicate larger and more significant differences in the overall thinking and approach to the choreographic repertoire between different dancers. Furthermore, from these finer details we are able to learn more about the works as choreographic texts. For example, the choreography of the “Nora” variation could be interpreted in such a way that we begin to see links between completely different sections, and different performing idioms within the same ballet (as was observed in Forskitt’s performance of the “Nora” variation, which appeared to make references to the “Kate” solo).

Overall, through a combined analytical method (the review of historical records, movement analysis, ethnographic work, and interviews) it was again revealed that dancers' contributions in both cultures emerge through a combination of interpretative choices and choreographic directions, often blending the documentary with the imaginary. Forsythe's choreography enabled a wide range of investigative possibilities, where different dancers responded to the material according to their individual level of engagement with the choreographer's practice.

The next chapter will present a comparison of my findings regarding the dancers' interpretations across the respective choreographic repertoires of Balanchine and Forsythe. These comparisons will uncover more layers about the dancers' contributions, and offer further insights into the performance of plotless ballets.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

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<sup>1</sup> For example, sections of the 1986 ballet *The Interrogation of Robert Scott* (including the ballet-based steps of the "Tuna" segment, seen in the workshop by Elizabeth Corbett at the Impulse Tanz Festival in 2008, accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6F5rEHHCTVkse>) are underpinned with the theme of the South Pole exploration, as a metaphor for the quest of ballet dancers. As explained in Siegmund (2011), and by Forsythe himself in Sulcas (2002), the concept was to compare the unattainable balletic ideals (for example, achievement of a "perfect arabesque") with the equally elusive search for the particular geographical spot on the ground that Scott could call the South Pole.

<sup>2</sup> Forsythe's well known use of multimedia in his choreography often includes experimentation with the principles of other art forms that he employs in his theatre practice. For example, as early as in *Gänge* (1983) Forsythe investigated the use of cinematic composition, story-boarding and editing principles in theatrical ballet performance (see Sulcas, 2002, 97). In the late 1980s Forsythe integrated art history, parody and spoken text (for example in *Impressing the Czar*, 1988) and explored the musical theatre genre in *Isabelle Dance* (1986). Since the early 1990s (when his exploration of literature, television and ecstatic-trance forms was used in *The Loss of Small Detail* (1991). Forsythe's interest in these integrated explorations grew into complex choreographic forms, where ballet idiom is practically unrecognisable (although not necessarily inexistent). The current opus in The Forsythe Company (2005-onward) further explores such practice. As summarised by Sulcas (2001, 11) these later, "wildly theatrical works" often "incorporate flamboyant mixes of speech, film, video, props, music, dance and, often, complex technology". Forsythe's work outside of theatre (performance installations and choreographic objects) blend principles of choreography with the concepts found across visual arts, as explained in Forsythe's article-manifesto "Choreographic Objects" (Forsythe, 2010, online).

<sup>3</sup> Caspersen (2000) explains the exploration of Laban's principles from the dancer's point of view, and her article (Caspersen, 2000, 30) is illustrated with a Labanotation chart (created by Ballett Frankfurt dancer Noah Gelber). As the article explains, the symbols are used in the creative process in *ALIE/NA(C)TION* (1992). But some dancers who explored Laban's Choreutic concepts as guided by Forsythe, did not engage with the actual Laban theory. For example, Pite in the first day of the workshop used some Laban's principles, but she clarified that she had learnt them from Forsythe, although she did not engage in Laban's concepts themselves. (Pite, workshop and personal conversation 28 November 2008 in Toronto)

<sup>4</sup> This text is an expanded version of Caspersen's earlier published article, Caspersen 2000.

<sup>5</sup> In Forsythe's creative process, music and movement are sometimes created simultaneously, and at times as explained by Willems, the composer was "reading pieces of Forsythe's choreography" (Willems in The Royal Ballet Programme notes, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> While different versions of the title capitalisation may be found in various publications (such as *The Second Detail*, *The second detail*), I am adhering to the lower-case version, *the second detail*, which was used in the Programme notes from the premiere at the Ballett Frankfurt, 21 December 1991 (*The Loss Project Archive*, Folder A8/1), as well as consistently at The National Ballet of Canada since the 1991 premiere.

<sup>7</sup> The design has changed somewhat since the Toronto premiere, where the women wore black sheer tights over the grey leotards. Furthermore, current international productions (including the Dresden Semper Oper Ballett 2007 and Boston Ballet 2011), include a redesign of original, Forsythe's leotards which are still used in the Canadian production. (For example, the female leotards are now sleeveless with high collar, designed by dancer and costume designer Yumiko Takeshima.) In the 2002a recording of Ballett Frankfurt there were no leotards. Short grey *Pleats Please* Miyake tunics were used instead.

<sup>8</sup> The dress was the first collaboration between Forsythe and Miyake, and the idea to develop clothing that is embodied well in movement later resulted in the *Pleats Please* concept. Now a particular clothing brand in the Issey Miyake design house, *Pleats Please* concentrates on innovations in the synthetic polyester fabric that is pleated in very complex combinations of origami-style foldings. Miyake credits Forsythe for the inspiration, and the brand was launched in 1993 following Miyake's work on *The Loss of Small Detail*. (See Issey Miyake's official presentation "The Concepts and Works of Issey Miyake". Accessed at: <http://mds.isseymiyake.com/im/en/work/>) The original white dress in *the second detail*, was related, but not clearly related to the *Pleats Please* brand. The programme notes from the National Ballet of Canada (1991) denote the white dress as the Miyake "White Collombe dress".

<sup>9</sup> "An ingenious man who had built a flying-machine invited a great concourse of people to see it go up. At the appointed moment, everything being ready, he boarded the car and turned on the power. The machine immediately broke through the massive substructure upon which it was built, and sank out of sight into the earth, the aeronaut springing out barely in time to save himself. "Well," said he, "I have done enough to demonstrate the correctness of my details. The defects," he added, with a look at a ruined brick work, "are merely basic and fundamental." On this assurance the people came forward with subscriptions to build a second machine". The quote is from Ambrose Bierce, "The Flying-Machine" from *The Secret of Happiness And Other Fantastic Fables*, New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, reprinted in The National Ballet of Canada (2008) *Performance*, June 13-22, 2008, 2. and *Le Magazine de la Place des Arts*, Montreal, 1992, 4, 1. The excerpt was not found in the Ballett Frankfurt programmes.

<sup>10</sup> The Canadian original included a large improvised section in the final part of the work, and this material has changed since (into the "Hula" choreography).

<sup>11</sup> There are some elements from the Canadian version that are now integrated into *The Loss of Small Detail* (dimmed stage, the "snow", a video screen projection). Neither the "Hula" section, nor the "Kate" solo, existed in the first version. (Instead, a male dancer, Rex Harrington, performed an improvisational segment in classical balletic idiom.) The music is changed in this last part of the dance as well. In the current version, *the second detail* represents classical counterpart of *The Loss of Small Detail*.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the new revision for Ballett Frankfurt (autumn 1991), there were other adjustments introduced in 1992 and 2005. The National Ballet of Canada was the only company that continued to perform its original 1991 version until their "rights expired" (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008). In 2008, the National Ballet of Canada also adopted the Ballett Frankfurt final version (set by Johnson).

<sup>13</sup> Choreographic notes in *The Loss Project* explain the references used in the creative process, including the literary pretexts using African folk tales, and a central quote from Yukio Mishima's 1969 novel *Runaway Horses*. As Preston-Dunlop (2009) explains in the "Introduction" to *The Loss Project*, "*The Loss of Small Detail* is 64-minute piece of dance theatre, for dancers and speakers, with music by collaborator Thom Willems, lighting by Forsythe, props, and films by Lens and Fanderl, and texts by Forsythe, Mishima, and Rothenberg".

<sup>14</sup> This explanation appears in interviews by Forsythe (for example Sadler's Wells Screen, online) and in Caspersen's demonstration in a public interview in London (Lilian Baylis Studio, Sadler's Wells, 6 December, 2010). Caspersen speaks about the concepts in her articles in 2000 and 2011, and is currently expanding this research in a forthcoming article, with the working title "What Épaulement Also Is".

<sup>15</sup> As Forsythe explained in an interview from 1999, the disfocus "means that you use the co-ordinations you know as a ballet dancer" but now apply them as "a kind of épaulement mirrored inwards" (Forsythe in Siegmund, 1999, 16). As Forsythe explains, the "disfocus" is not possible without embodied understanding of the principles of balletic épaulement. By speaking about the "ballet dancer", however, Forsythe does not make a cultural distinction but highlights the importance of the dancer's ability to access this particular vocabulary and information in balletic form: "If you weren't a ballet dancer, you couldn't do this really effectively, because you wouldn't understand how the eye and hip work together" Forsythe, in Siegmund, 1999, 16. As Caspersen clarifies, disfocus directed the visual focus and the dancer heading toward a trance state and this is explored in *The Loss of Small Detail*, in contrast with the exploration of outward gaze in *the second detail* (in Caspersen, 2000 and 2011).

<sup>16</sup> As Caspersen elaborates, "In this state of dis-focus, the principles of relationship, the complex, internal refractions that are the learned reflex of épaulement, are inverted or twisted, so that the relationships, or the quality of relation remains, but the form that they take is altered; it is an inverse body that flows backward from the gaze" (Caspersen, 2011, 96).

<sup>17</sup> Caspersen kindly shared her unpublished material, MA Portfolio Dana Caspersen, and the draft of "What Épaulement Also Is".

<sup>18</sup> Johnson during rehearsals in the National Ballet of Canada, May 2008

<sup>19</sup> In the original, Canadian version this dance covered a very wide space, while currently the solo occupies a tighter section of the stage (mainly the left half). The visual design of the "Tracy" solo has changed. Originally (when danced by Lamy), the variation was performed on a dimly-lit stage, with the atmospheric snowflakes falling on the dancer. Today's version is designed consistently with the rest of the ballet (brightly-lit). Specific movements are changed throughout — for example the opening step is more lyrical than the current version (instead of an abrupt double piqué, Lamy performs a lingering grand rond de jambe en dehors, bringing her arms upward into a high "V" shape).

<sup>20</sup> The first recording shows the Toronto premiere (20 February 1991 in Toronto), supervised directly by Forsythe. The second recording captures the Company's tour to Montreal one year later (October 1992). The casting is very similar, with the exception of Johnson and Maurice Causey who joined Ballett Frankfurt in the meantime.

<sup>21</sup> For example, the quadrants of Johnson's torso often work in conjunction with gestural movements, as in combinations of grand battements and the port de bras throughout the variation.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson explained that she performed nearly all female roles, including "Tracy." Her original role is another smaller female solo, named "Jill" (that follows the longer "Tracy" role in the "Pas de six").

<sup>23</sup> This step modification is now introduced in some of Johnson's stagings. Several dancers, including Forskitt and Fournier followed Johnson's lead, and thus may be seen on their films performing the tour en l'air.

<sup>24</sup> In this sense, the variation seems to transition from the formal and more conventional *the second detail*, to the unruly realm of *The Loss of Small Detail*. Caspersen agreed with the notion that "Kate" may be seen to represent a bridge between the two parts. "I would say that Kate's solo in *the second detail* has a kind of a bridging function. A heralding" (Caspersen, email correspondence 14 March 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Yu's extensive training was in the Vaganova style school in Beijing, China. She spent her final school year in Canada's National Ballet School, but she explained that this senior year was used to learn different variations and to generally prepare for the company auditions. She felt that her classical training mostly related to her Vaganova base (Yu, interview, 23 October 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Yu is often cast in noble, ethereal roles. For example, she is better known as Odette, Aurora or Giselle, in comparison for instance with Fournier, who is sometimes selected for soubrette repertory, or Balanchine's "athletic" roles, such as the von Aroldingen role in the *Stravinsky Violin Concerto*.

<sup>27</sup> The date of the premiere was 11 January 1985, although there are some discrepancies in the information, as there are many sources who note 1986 as the year of the *Steptext* premiere (for instance, Nugent 2000). Forsythe's company documents stored in the LABAN Centre's *The Loss Project Archive* confirm 1985 as the year of the creation, and Aterballetto's official online presentation clarifies the date and venue of the premiere (11 January 1985 in Reggio Emilia, Teatro Ariosto).

<sup>28</sup> *Artifact* premiered in Ballett Frankfurt on 5 December 1984 (Spier, 2011, 159).

<sup>29</sup> On 1996 recording of the Royal Ballet, the stage manager's voice is audible throughout the performance.

<sup>30</sup> Hammond's recent conference paper, "Making Dance Epic: Brecht, (The Royal) Ballet, Britain, and the BBC", The Society for Dance Research Conference: British Dance Institutions, University of Roehampton, 19 May 2012.

<sup>31</sup> According to the list of tasks for the dancers in Forsythe's ballets compiled by Ana Catalina Roman, assignments for *Steptext* relate to the tasks explored in the second act of the *Artifact*. According to this list, specific improvisational assignment used in *Steptext* is described as "parallel arms, body straight," (in Roman and Preston-Dunlop, 1987-2005, A8/10/1) and there is no reference to the themes mentioned by Forsythe above.

<sup>32</sup> Some shorter improvised sections can be found for instance in the main female solo (the Guillem role) from *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* (1987). The dancers, as explained by Gates who coaches the role internationally do not improvise in extensive measure, concentrating on the principle of "u-ing" and "o-ing" (Gates, interview, 31 August 2011).

<sup>33</sup> There is apparent flexibility in the timing of the introduction. Since this section of the ballet begins as the audience starts coming into the auditorium, on some evenings the silent solos may last longer. The cues given by the stage manager guide the dancers (as evident from the background sound on the recording of The Royal Ballet's archival production in 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Additionally, Caspersen's aforementioned MA Thesis Portfolio was a useful source as it discusses her own performing experience in *Artifact*.

<sup>35</sup> As was observed during my fieldwork in open classes in Canada's National Ballet School (noted in 2.8), the Royal Ballet School class (by Stock) very much emphasises precision in execution and phrasing of steps, in comparison, for example, with the National Ballet School of Cuba (Vaganova style of training), and even Canada's National Ballet School (class by Lamy), where the details of pace are left to the dancer to interpret, relying on the dancer's individual musical sensitivity.

<sup>36</sup> Bull explained this was an unusual process in the repertory company such as the Royal Ballet. "Because Forsythe was supposed to be doing a new work which he didn't do, his time was allocated, and the company's time was allocated. And so essentially he came and spent all that time in the studio, rehearsing a ballet that has been made in 1985... That's very, very unusual. You know, normally you'd have a répétiteur who comes along, and maybe the choreographer may come for few final days" (Bull, interview, 17 May 2011).

<sup>37</sup> The effects of these two approaches in performance cannot be observed at present, as Johnson's films featuring examples of such works, for instance *Duo* (1996), are not currently available.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE DANCER'S CONTRIBUTION IN LEOTARD BALLETS: OBSERVING THE MAJOR THEMES

#### 6.0 INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the performances in the Balanchine and Forsythe choreography showed the variety of conceptual and embodied approaches that dancers develop in their interpretations of the leotard ballets discussed. This chapter reflects upon the detailed material and revisits the key aspects observed in the case studies. By collating this information, it becomes clearer what common threads, important reoccurring themes, as well as major differences are evident in the dancers' approaches that shape their contributions in the selected works. For example, by looking at both case studies collectively, issues specific to the aesthetic of the leotard ballet genre become apparent more easily.

The new information from the case studies points us back toward the discussions presented in Chapter 1 (1.1, 1.2; 1.3), in which ideas about the abstraction and plotlessness, and the scope of the dancer's role in leotard ballets were theoretically considered. As both case studies show, many dancers in this study develop their approaches by aiming to understand the choreographer's idea, while still including their own readings and conceptualisations. The analyses of the solo examples also reveal similarities and differences between the perspectives of the performer and the spectator, and provide us with more information about the dancer's relationship with their plotless roles. This chapter also revisits some of the initial questions which were identified in the thesis Introduction, and are now



considered after the conversations with dancers and the analysis of their performances. Although throughout this chapter I mainly reflect upon the information already presented in the case studies, I also introduce some additional related points generated in conversations with dancers.

## 6.1 PERFORMING PLOTLESS ROLES: THE DANCER'S IDEAS

The method of comparing different solos from the same work (as in the case of Balanchine's *The Four Temperaments*, 4.1-4.3, and Forsythe's *the second detail*, 5.1-5.3) revealed that dancers may find a variety of structural ideas but also some narrative allusions in a single work. The analysis of *Agon* (4.4-4.5) and *Steptext* (5.4-5.5) also showed that even shorter units of action in the same role may inspire the same dancer to observe several overlapping themes, depending on the dance material in the particular sections. For instance, some dancers found different issues in a solo, than what they observed in a duet, trio, or group section in the same ballet. This was observed in Bull's process in the solos and duet in *Steptext* (5.5, pp. 224-226), and in Verdy's explanations about the solo and trio sections in *Agon* (4.5, p.159), where they spoke about different internal impressions when dancing alone, and dancing in their respective group sections.

Such readings were dancers' own, and did not necessarily refer to the conceptualisations put forth by the choreographer or staging expert, at various times. This aspect was apparent in many examples. For example, as discussed in 4.1, Balanchine emphasised formal ideas and musical references in *The Four Temperaments*. But, dancers in this study more often spoke about various metaphoric imagery and allusions to stories, which they found by reading the movement material of the "Melancholic" variation (4.2). Overall, the empirical research in this study demonstrates that what may be perceived as the minimal aesthetic,

for the dancer may open various exploratory paths and may stimulate a wide variety of interesting responses.

The range of the dancers' conceptualisations in this research thus spanned from formal ideas to (nearly) linear narratives; there were sometimes fictional themes and imagery, as well as ideas relating to the performers' real-lives and documentary experiences. It is equally recognised that these ideas are not fixed, they may overlap and indeed change in the short or longer term for the same performer. But, while the aim of this thesis is not to compile a taxonomy, or create a classification of various approaches, for the purpose of clarity the range of ideas and dancers' experiences observed in the four ballets is laid out as several distinct categories:

- abstract ideas/references;
- autobiographical themes and (non)fictional narratives;
- imagery, metaphors and allusions (although not about characters/stories);
- allusions to portraits of characters/personas (without linear stories);
- emergence of the themes/characters in a more unified, linear narrative.

## 1. ABSTRACT IDEAS AND REFERENCES

Several dancers in the interviews seemed particularly comfortable exploring abstract, formal and structural aspects of the dance. For example, Calegari felt that the term “abstract” as applied to a ballet can be appropriate and useful. In Balanchine's roles she rarely thought of any fictional allusions or imagery, but rather found distinctions in terms of, as she calls it, the “energy essence” of the dance. As explained in 4.5, Calegari only thought of “energy” and the abstract imagery (coloured “flames”). As she explained, *The*

*Four Temperaments* might have been a little more like “a blue flame — cool flame”, while *Agon* would have been “a little... warmer [‘gold’<sup>1</sup>] flame” (Calegari, interview, 14 December 2011). Similarly, for Ashley, “Sanguinic” related to several abstract themes, such as the musical phrasing and the sensations of “suspension and falling and leaning toward something”. She reflected upon “Sanguinic” as a theme about “being drawn to something, and needing, wanting to get there” (Ashley, interview, 28 October 2011). Although there are clear images in these dancers’ ideas, they relate to the structural elements of movement. These images are connected to the dance material itself, and not to a type of story or a persona.

While all dancers may explore particular elements of music, spatial forms, and their relationships with the movement in any dance, some performers highlight these issues very strongly in relation to the leotard ballets studied here. Aspects of musical exploration are among the frequently mentioned elements that dancers particularly perceive in plotless ballets. Performers from the Balanchine culture (both Calegari in “Bransle Gay”, 4.5, and Ashley in “Sanguinic”, 4.3, for example) displayed a highly developed ability to illuminate particular music-movement relationships in performance. They also explained and elaborated upon fine aspects of musical phrasing in their interviews. Ashley in particular felt that musical exploration is amplified in the minimal aesthetic of leotard ballets. Such performing environment, she felt, promotes the dancer’s relationship with structural elements that are present in the work, particularly music. As Ashley explained, the focus in leotard ballets becomes directed toward the “connection with the music, and the rhythms and the motions of the steps” (Ashley, interview, 28 October 2011).

Dancers from the Ballett Frankfurt were particularly comfortable both exploring and sharing views about structural concepts in their roles. As discussed in my introduction to *the second detail* (5.1), one of the investigations in this ballet focused on épaulement, exploring how the shifts in this system may result in different movement qualities and cause different internal experiences (shifting from focus to disfocus, as explained by Caspersen in 5.1). Additionally, other discussions with Caspersen always revealed her ideas about subtle internal processes that she perceives in the exploration of the specific movement concepts (on p. 176, for instance). Other Ballett Frankfurt dancers also often discussed their ideas relating to the formal elements. For them too music was one of the intrinsic elements frequently mentioned. Gates, for instance, spoke about the importance of “polyrhythms” in “Tracy” (5.2); Johnson focused on “the musicality” of the “Nora” solo (5.3), and explored the relationship with music in the moments of silence in *Steptext*, 5.5. Even the famous curtain drops in the “Second Act” of the *Artifact*, to Johnson also represented “giant, very obvious punctuations of the music” (interview, 30 December 2008).

It is further noted that these and other dancers, who articulated their opinions about the abstract concepts in the dances, also left very memorable and illuminating performances in terms of musical articulation. The elucidations of dance movement through the engagement of various body points by Gates and Johnson in *the second detail* left distinctive musical impressions of their variations. Calegari’s particular sensitivity to music illuminated “Bransle Gay” in a particular way (5.5). As discussed in Chapter 3, it is certain that the training that the two choreographers developed in their companies helped the development of particular qualities in their dancers. Further research is needed, however, before it would be possible to evidence that there is a direct correlation between these vivid

performances and the dancers' high comfort level, affinity and strong cognitive engagement with various structural concepts. For now, it is important to make a record of this effect as one of the interesting possibilities that emerges in the performance of leotard ballets in particular, as Ashley suggests above.

## 2. (NON)FICTIONAL NARRATIVES

In certain examples, the ideas that the dancers report cannot be described neither as abstract, nor as fictional imagery. For example, speaking about "Bransle Gay" (4.5) Bull conveyed her impression of a close connection with the audience in performance, describing her feeling of an intimate conversation. Further, in the "Bransle Gay" role, all dancers spoke about the solo as an expression of their "femininity" (pp. 162-163). Ashley and Bull, for example, described distinctive images of feminineness, which they saw as a less frequently highlighted side of their personalities. While Ashley felt that she could feel sensuous, Bull felt at the same time delicate and "powerful", because of the feeling that the whole "house stops" during the "small solo" (cited on p. 163). Arguably, with these ideas, these two dancers were projecting a degree of documentary narrative, which is here a loosely used term<sup>2</sup> to describe the dancers were telling us something about themselves and how they would like to be perceived.

Some dancers, for instance, directly associated aspects of a leotard ballet role with aspects of their personal lives. Forskitt in "Nora" (5.3) communicated her great enthusiasm for dancing the solo, and her relationship with her colleagues on stage. Through her dance and also in her interview, Forskitt revealed movement phrases which she particularly enjoyed (such as the opening walk and the port de bras, p. 207). In this choreography, as she

explains, Forskitt was “feeling like herself” and “forgetting” that she was in pointe shoes. She also observed the differences between particular sections of the role: in the solo she felt “free” and independent, and in the duet she identified the theme of the mutual “trust” in dance with her partner. All these themes related to her own experiences as a dancer (or “actor”/agent in the Altman and Bal sense of the word, 1.1), and not to character impersonations, or to portraying how someone else might feel. Although she did not think of a story, Forskitt conveyed a kind of autobiographical information, revealing her performing personality and strong affection for the particular role.

In some cases, however, the autobiographical “narratives” were mixed and integrated with fictional themes and images. For example, the discussions with Lamy about her performance in “Tracy”(5.2) and with Yu about “Nora” (5.3) revealed that they blended non-fictional information and fictional images in their processes. Lamy guided the viewer through Willems’s electronic musical score quite clearly, aiming to display her “versatility” as a dancer. At the same time, she felt as a “stage persona”: an imagined “French woman” who could do anything (5.2). Similarly, Yu, who felt that she is best known as a classicist in terms of her personal performing style, used the possibilities she found in the Forsythe movement style of the “Nora” solo to show more diverse abilities as a ballet dancer. At the same time, she also thought of herself as a character in a fictional story, a “girl” who listens to classical music, finding herself in a rock-concert, and having fun by “letting loose” in the dance (5.3).

From the viewer’s perspective it was interesting to learn that when the dancers use such personal experiences in the plotless dances -- for example, communicate their ideas about their training, or the enthusiasm for the role, these ideas translate into unique movement

qualities in performance. For instance, as established in 5.3, Forskitt and Yu had very distinctive interpretations of the “Nora” role. This aspect emerges as another area of further interest. Although Forsythe explored various concepts where the dancer develops personal, autobiographical responses (as it can be understood from the documents in *The Loss Project*, for example), the creative potentials of the dancer’s personal stance toward the plotless role may be an interesting area for the cognitive research of the performance.

### 3. THE INCLUSION OF METAPHORIC ALLUSIONS AND IMAGERY: ABSENCE OF CHARACTERS OR STORIES

From discussions with several dancers, it is clear that they did distinguish their solos from their autobiographical experiences, and they did not feel that they were enacting personas or characters either. Yet, a strong dramatic theme or an image often emerged in the process of preparation or performance, but there was no sense that the imagery progresses into a kind of a story-like development. Rather, such isolated images served to explain, enhance or invoke a particular atmosphere in the mind of the dancer.

For example, some performers were very careful about the level of narrative inference that they could include in particular solos. As noted in 4.2, Canadian principal dancer Antonijevic identified a distinction between conveying a character (the “phlegmatic man”) and a feeling or emotion (the “phlegmatic” temperament). He felt that this was a fine, yet a crucial line that should not be misrepresented in the performance. As Antonijevic explained, *The Four Temperaments* was “one of the hardest ballets to do, because it [the expression] has to be so subtle” in terms of the meaning implied through the movement. While some characteristics of the “temperament” have to “be visible for the audience, if

someone is over-doing it it's really out of place, but if you're really not doing anything, you find that it all becomes just abstract dance — which it isn't" (Antonijevic, interview, 23 October 2009). Similarly, Bull was cautious about the degree of narrative she might project in the *Steptext* duets (5.5). Since she was the only woman relating to three men, Bull felt that a carefree or assertive approach might "easily" cross into the terrain of "a domestic drama" (Bull, cited on p. 228). These are examples when the dancers engage with certain allusions of a situation, or metaphoric images that help them shade the role in a particular way.

Sometimes the dancers discussed vivid analogies and metaphors in relation to particular roles, but emphasised that they see a clear distinction between such images and the concept of a character. A former principal dancer from the National Ballet of Canada and the Australian Ballet, Geon Van der Wyst, explained about his role — the male lead in Forsythe's *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* (1987): "I didn't feel like I was a character, but I did feel like I was a machine". This impression was due, he said, to the combination of perpetual and kinetically challenging movements and the effect of pulsating music and stroboscope lighting used in the Australian Ballet production (Van der Wyst, interview, 23 September 2010).

Verdy and Gates, speaking independently and about very different works, both explained that the primary imagery that they thought of related to the musical score. For example, as discussed in 5.2, Gates in the "Tracy" solo explored questions such as: "If I was an instrument, a percussive instrument, how would I play? And how would that move me across spaces" (Gates, interview, 31 August 2011). Verdy explained that for her the music always told the story: "The music-story gives me the mood, and maybe even an



expression” (Verdy, interview, 9 October 2011). For instance, she felt that Webern’s atonal music in her role in Balanchine’s black-and-white *Episodes* (1959) made her think of her solo through an analogy of “a piece of Gruyere cheese”. There were “as many holes as cheese”, which was her reference to the proportion between the silences and sounds in the musical score).

It is interesting to note the power of these isolated images that still serve to depict the “atmosphere” of the piece, defined by Altman (2008, 11). As Altman explained, such images are different from the concept of narrative, as they are not framed through the “narrative drives” and “narrative actions”, which produce a series of patterns that create a sense of following an event in continuity (as elaborated in Chapter 1, note 8).

#### 4. IMAGES OF CHARACTERS AND PERSONALITY TYPES: ABSENCE OF STORY-LINES

Several dancers found that their leotard ballet solos included references to a particular character, type, or persona, but the impression was that these characters were isolated from specific situations, or linear narratives. As previously established, Lamy saw herself as a “French persona” in *the second detail* (5.2) and this image related to a particular feeling of freedom and sensuality in the role, rather than a story-line. In contrast, her role in “Sanguinic” made Lamy think of herself as “a New York-persona”, an urban, “edgy” and free-thinking personality (Lamy, interview, 15 April 2011). Similarly, Ballet Frankfurt’s Pite explained that she felt like a “character in a video game” in Forsythe’s *AlienA/c/tion* (1994), but she did not elaborate on a particular plot-line or narrative of that “game” (Pite, interview, 4 January 2009).

Sometimes this type of imagery was completely unrelated to the choreographer's primary idea, as in the examples above. Yet, some images were developed by interpreting the choreographer's direct guidance. For example, in Balanchine's movement demonstration of the "Saraband" solo in *Agon*, Cook read an image from the choreographer's movement and this helped him phrase his own specific approach. The choreographer wanted the role played with a sense of humour, and he indicated through gesture an image suggestive of a "jester" as a guidance for that particular phrase (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes, when the dancers did not work directly with the choreographer, they developed the sense of a character or personality type by reading the movement itself. For example, Dumais found that in *The Four Temperaments* Balanchine "didn't want us to think of temperaments because he didn't want any acting". "It is not about looking choleric in your face, it's about being choleric: it is about the storm... about how the wind blows, it's something much less literal than being choleric..."

It's a whole feeling in the body. And he did it in the choreography, it's there. The same thing with "Phlegmatic". It's much slower, it's much more laid back. Your head is always slightly pulled back, and your hips are always pulled forward, because that's how phlegmatic people are (Dumais, interview, 31 May 2011).

This is quite different from imagining oneself in a continual narrative, and some dancers saw this continuation of a "story" as a major point of difference between narrative and plotless roles. As Canadian ballerina Fournier explained, "when you do dramatic, narrative parts, it is important to have almost sentences or thoughts ... but you don't do that in the non-narrative work. For example, you don't say, 'How are you doing?' in the same literal sense" (Fournier, telephone interview, 27 April 2011).

## 5. READING THE MOVEMENT MEANING: THE EMERGENCE OF A PLOT

In contrast with Fournier's impression above, in their roles several dancers thought of characters, but also about the plot-line, in terms of what was happening with the character in succession, as the dance progressed. In this sense there was an impression that they were speaking about a continual story, developing in a linear fashion. These examples come very close to the process that is discussed in reference to the narrative roles (1.3). One of such examples was found in Balanchine's "Melancholic" (4.2) where Cook and Konvalina, two dancers from different company cultures and eras, found the ideas about the succession of events in choreography by directly reading the movement material. Both dancers spoke about the movement as a more or less literal succession of unfolding events. Konvalina showed this in his performance, and also verbally explained his view of the narrative in the interview. He saw the two demi-soloists as "two different kinds of melancholic moods" he was fighting, and he wanted to know "what they are doing all the time" (Konvalina, interview, 23 October 2009). His feeling that "it's all connected in some way" is particularly important as it points towards a type of story-boarding or perceiving a kind of unified plot-line, which as a concept may remind us of the theories of "plot", noted in 1.1.

Cook had perhaps less of a literal story in mind, and more a collection of metaphoric images, when he spoke of images of "self-flagellation", "melting down" and "being compressed" in "Melancholic" (p. 127). Nevertheless, he also came close to giving a narrative reading of the role. For Cook, it was "obvious that the two girls who come out are the barriers that he [the "Melancholic" man] is wading through". Cook further saw the man later facing six women together who collectively represented "an obstacle" (p. 128). There

was a clear thread of events developing for Cook: “They are kicking at him... He jumps in the air and collapses on a crescendo” (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).

Sometimes the dancer did not see the solo as a kind of a narrative, yet a sense of a storyline developed through the discussion of the sections of the whole ballet put together in sequence of events. In *Agon*, for instance, Verdy did not see the particular movement phrases in her “Bransle Gay” solo as a narrative, but her discussion of the sections of the “Second pas de trois” brings out a sense of an underlying “discursive” narrative (Barthes, 1977, cited in 1.1). As discussed in 4.5, Verdy felt able to be free, enjoying a “jazzy type of situation”, yet in the coda (“Bransle Double”) there was a sense of friendly competition or “oneupmanship” with her two male partners (p. 161). This was not really “a romance” because there was a trio. Verdy rather saw the relationships as a kind of “a free competition” with the men, where the woman manages “to keep her own.” In the process, the men “even help her, and partner her, and they take turns” (Verdy, interview, 9 October 2011).

Collectively, the five distinctive modes of exploration discussed in this section show that the dancers articulate, both in performance and verbally, a spectrum of ideas about their roles in analysed ballets. Each of the aforementioned five categories has potential to be analysed further. For example, a separate discussion may be developed about the concept of a documentary narrative, discussed in reference to the mode 2 (the autobiographical references). Film theory is useful in understanding the differences between the storyboarding (as in screenplays) and the documentary approach. Such distinctions are discussed in recent writings by Danish theorists Ib Bondebjerg (2008) and Mikael Opstrup (2002), who explore the relationship between documentary forms and narration.

Bondebjerg found several basic types of narration of non-fictional narratives (2008, online), and Opstrup concluded that while fictional films are defined by the stories, documentary programmes are “defined by their subjects”. Since the documentarist as the author collects the material about the subject as the events are unfolding, Opstrup elaborates, the relationship to the full story is not always as clear and defined as in the films with screenplays (2002, online).

In this study, the dancers contemplating their own experiences and projecting something about them to the viewer may remind us of Opstrup’s explications about the focus on the subject. In the case of Bull in *Agon*, or even in her performances in the *Steptext* solo, we may recognise the dancer expressing a kind of an unfolding narrative about herself that is not necessarily premeditated before the performance. Our focus is on the figure, the subject, and not necessarily the narrative. Similarly, these points about autobiographical experiences from this mode (2) may remind us of Bal’s observations about the underlying “ideological” meanings that may be present in “non-narrative” texts (as discussed on p. 14). The approaches by Fournier and Yu in the “Nora” role revealed something about their stance on ballet training, and their “opinions”, as Bal puts it, about the choreography and the way how it could be danced (as explained in 5.3, p 214.).

All approaches where a sense of narrative is diminished, but an image of a person (the real dancer, as in mode 2, or an imaginary character, as in mode 4) is highlighted also may be further explored in reference to Bal’s theory. When a dancer emphasises a projection of a certain persona, or a type of imaginary character, yet there is no sense of the connection to particular story-line, we may have come across what Bal denotes as “character portraits” (2009, 114). Bal explains that in some cases, when a great emphasis is placed on

the coherence of a “character”, then the material that has a potential to become a narrative may be “reduced” to a type of a [psychological] “portrait” (2009, 114).<sup>4</sup> Altman (2008, 20) explains that the situations where the emphasis is placed on the subject reduces the “narrative drive”, and thus diminishes or disrupts the existence of a narrative.<sup>5</sup>

For example, Lamy’s emphasis on the versatility of her “French persona” in “Tracy”, in combination with Forsythe’s request to her to “tone-down” the story (5.2), influenced her dancing approach and the look of her dance. The effect thus may be seen as an expression of a kind of a “portrait” of a persona, since there was no sense of a “narrative drive” to produce an allusion to a story. In this sense, the aforementioned effects that emerge through the interpretations of Yu and Lamy in *the second detail* do not come across as dramatic stories, yet there are elements of portraiture and “ideological” messages in their performances. For example, the fictional image of Yu’s “girl who goes to a rock concert” but also responds to the perceived “type” of the dancer she is often viewed as, or Lamy’s “French persona” in combination with her objective to communicate her versatility as a dancer (“who can do anything”, p. 194), come out as kinds of examples of dance “docu-fictional” portraits.

“Docu-fiction”, an aesthetic concept that originated in film theory, was recently identified in contemporary visual art practice by French art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud (2009, online). For Bourriaud, docu-fiction emerges as a performative idea in which the artist layers “fictionalised” elements with non-fictional information, such as historical materials and personal information or enquiry.<sup>6</sup> As film scholar Jean-Pierre Candeloro reminds us, although it is always difficult to find the boundaries between document(ary) and fiction, there is a functional distinction: docu-fictional art aims for a dual function, to inform and

entertain in equal measure (1999/2000, 37). This type of essentially intertextual device is found in those films where elements of “real life” are reorganised through formal tools and are then “put together” to achieve a “quasi-documentary dimension” (Candeloro, 1999/2000, 41-42).<sup>7</sup>

The discussion of autobiographical aspects and “portraits” in combination with the information editing, that Candeloro implies, may further point us in the direction of Dennett’s theoretical concept of “Self as the Center of Narrative Gravity”. In his cognitive heterophenomenological theory, Dennett recognises an occurrence where the “knower and reporter” of internal, phenomenal experiences engages in “the production of ‘self’ through language” (1991, 410-411), or through communication. In this sense, we are rather facing a “subject position in an infinite web of discourses”, which can surface either verbally or non-verbally. Although this concept in its complexity requires far more rigorous theoretical examination, it is conceivable that similar webs of discourses, mentioned by Dennett, could be seen in those situations when the dancers build a “subject position” combining documentary, autobiographical portraits, with some fictional imagery.

All these intriguing possibilities open many new questions. For now, they are starting points of further investigations. More research is required to examine these concepts. Each mode, and all collectively, could be examined further for each of the ideas indicated in the paragraphs above. For the present thesis, however, it is more important to note them as appearances of multitude of possibilities that the dancers find in plotless ballets. The five modes certainly may not be the only manifestations of other dancers’ processes (outside this study) in the mentioned and other leotard ballets. For now, they stand out most strongly as impressions about the effects produced by the dancers’ contributions.

But, while highlighting these modes as manifestations of the dancers' processes behind their analysed roles, it is particularly important to underscore once more that all five categories discussed here rarely occur in isolation, and that they do not necessarily remain constant throughout the dancer's career. As may be seen, the dancers often blend several concepts at once, and this is not only seen in the "docu-fictional" examples. For example, Cook emphasised the reading of the dramatic story events in "Melancholic", but he firmly emphasised the primary importance of the structural principles of "theme and variations", (expressed through the use of tombés and "falling", 4.3), throughout the ballet. Calegari, who found the abstract ideas of colour (a "gold flame") in *Agon's* "Bransle Gay" also found references to the earlier Balanchine ballet, *Apollo* (4.5). As discussed in 5.5, Bull in *Steptext* discovered an introverted exploration, but also equally focused on other intertextual aspects of the choreography — she noted the references to "baroque dances" and observed the dramatic potentials that may emerge through the relationships of dancers on stage.

The themes of exploration also could change significantly for each dancer in longer and shorter term. The short-term changes are expected in response to temporary experiences, for example when the dancer feels in a particular way, emotionally or physically, on a particular day or in specific performance, as found by Roses-Thema (2009, discussed in 2.3). Such effects were noted in this study too, for instance when Forskitt explained that the specific film captured her final performance in a favourite role ("Nora"), and thus some gestures or effects may have been amplified at that time in her approach (Forskitt, interview, 28 April 2011). Similarly, Calegari felt that her particular performance of *Agon* on film did not convey all the qualities she usually brought into the dance at other times (interview, 14 December, 2011).



But, for this thesis long-term changes were of predominant interest, as they related to the dancer's conceptual shifts that may have influenced the performing approach longer. For example, Konvalina felt that he changed his focus in his interpretation of the "Melancholic" solo from a more athletic performance to a more emotional one: it was "more important to express the mood, rather than show the technique" (Konvalina, interview, 23 October 2009). The analysis of Bull's two performances in *Steptext* revealed an impression of flux (5.5). Over a period of time there was a visible change in her approach, which was also observed by the dancer: "Changes, or a couple of shifts, might have occurred, perhaps based on how I was feeling at the time" (Bull, interview, 29 June 2011). She felt that a different partner induced a modification in her expression, and also that she felt more comfortable settling in certain movement "patterns" a year later.

In some cases, such long-term, conceptual shifts had an impact on the spectator's perceptions of the dance overall. It is recognised that the roles and ballets as texts changed over time due to the choreographic alterations, but also in some measure due to the different approaches and conceptualisations by the dancers. This is recognised in Jordan's and Stillwell's analyses of "Bransle Gay", and equally in my discussion in Chapter 4 (4.5). A similar impression also stood out in my analysis of "Sanguinic" (4.3), where two dancers (Ashley and Tallchief) who performed the same choreography in different eras in the same company, found very distinctive yet equally interesting images (being "pushed and pulled" and "Fred Astaire", respectively). Not only due to the choreographic shifts, but also by the dancers' perceptions brought new readings and thus changes in the look of the dance.

The changes and shifts in dancers' conceptualisations and interpretations as visible in the dance are thus significant. They have an impact on the spectator's perception of the dance

text. Implicitly this indicates the scope of the dancers' agency in the Balanchine and Forsythe choreography. As established in 2.1, the possibility of agency emerges in situations "where more than one course of action is practically available" (Giddens, 1984, 9; 15). By making choices and introducing their own visible readings, the dancers showed that the choreographic texts and particular roles analysed here allowed them to make individual decisions. This point is revisited in 6.6, where I further argue that this is an important aspect, equally present in the larger, "revolutionary" modifications, as well as smaller, "evolutionary" changes, described by Bull (and discussed in 5.5, p. 228).

## 6.2 DANCERS "BEING THEMSELVES" IN LEOTARD BALLETS

Another significant aspect of this research is the notion of the dancers feeling "like themselves" in particular roles in ballets in this study. While this sounds similar to the idea of a personal story or an autobiographical portrait discussed in the previous sections, the concept is actually distinctive and should be noted separately. The thesis opened with a quote from dancer Frederic Franklin, who was surprised when Balanchine asked him to "just be himself" on stage (pp.1-2). The concept of the actor performing as himself on stage is noted by Meyer-Dinkgraeve in theatre history in reference to Dadaism (1.3). This concept re-emerged during the conversations with contemporary dancers in my study, where several performers in varied contexts mentioned feeling like "themselves" on stage in a particular role. For example, Konvalina explained his feeling about a positive correlation between plotless roles and feeling like "oneself" on stage. The more "abstract" the role, the more the dancer feels like himself:

If there is the most abstract ballet ... then you really have to be yourself ... your face, your personality (Konvalina, interview, 23 October 2009).

But the true complexity of this concept is indicated by Caspersen, who made a careful distinction between the concepts of stage persona and “everyday persona”:

I don't experience a stage persona vs. an everyday persona. But the moment of performance is certainly a point of heightened concentration and awareness. There are pieces where I am really acting — behaving and experiencing in a way that I normally would not — and there are pieces where I am myself in extraordinary circumstances (like the situation of being in *In the Middle...*, for example). But again ... in each of these instances I am myself, reacting to the nature of my environment (Caspersen, email correspondence, 1 April 2011).

The layers of meaning found in the distinction between the “stage persona” and feeling like “oneself”, in conjunction with the “heightened” senses experienced during the performance, merit a separate inquiry. This issue could be examined further by looking more widely into the cognitive aspects of performance. For the purpose of the present discussion in this thesis, it should be noted that this impression of feeling like “oneself” in plotless roles was particularly reported by dancers in relation to Forsythe’s ballets. In this sense, there was no major difference between those dancers who had worked with Forsythe directly, and dancers who performed his works working with a staging expert in a repertory company. For the former group this is not surprising, as Forsythe often included movements generated by the dancer. For example, Lamy, as one of the original performers in the Canadian version of *the second detail*, explained that Forsythe “played with” various dancers’ strengths, bringing “different dynamics” out of them. Due to this process, Lamy explained, the dancer felt empowered. “We felt we were involved. He was interested to see how, what we had to contribute, and at the same time he shaped it” (Lamy, interview 15 April, 2011).

Dancers who re-created roles from the Forsythe repertoire while working in other companies also often emphasised feeling like “themselves” in performance. As established

already, Forskitt felt free to be herself in “Nora” (4.3). It was interesting, for example, to observe Antonijevic, one of the dancers in the Canadian production of *the second detail* (2008), who altered aspects of his usual personal image in the performances of this Forsythe ballet. (Antonijevic uncharacteristically styled his hair into a so-called “mock-mohawk” each time he performed in *the second detail* in 2008.) This detail in the visual appearance signalled to me as a spectator that the dancer was potentially exploring some new idea and that the addition of this hairstyle might be his personal comment on the costuming aesthetic. I also speculated that Antonijevic had imagined himself as a certain character in the role. In conversation, Antonijevic explained that this hairstyle modification in fact related to his sense of freedom to express a different side of his personality: “It just felt a little bit edgy, and we don’t really get to be edgy on stage as ballet dancers. So, it felt really freeing, and it felt like there was a different side of myself that I wanted to explore” (Antonijevic, interview, 23 October 2009).

The factors behind such impressions of freedom point us back to the concept of the dancer’s habitus (3.1) and perhaps reveal more about the environment and explorations that are possible for dancers of repertory ballet companies, where boundaries are more structured and defined (also observed by Wulff, 1998b). Some dancers emphasised the difference between the working process in repertory companies and in Forsythe’s works, where it seemed that there was “no right and wrong” (as Presta, 2011, and Johnson, 2008, explained in their interviews). It is possible that other aspects of Forsythe’s style also may contribute to the dancers’ feeling of “being themselves” in performance. As it was discussed in their respective introductions (5.1 and 5.4), dancers in these two ballets blend ballet vocabulary and pedestrian steps, blurring the boundaries between ballet codified and vernacular movement, and thus between on-stage and off-stage experiences. It is plausible

that the combination of not having to portray a character, together with interjecting a pedestrian, typically off-stage movement into the balletic performance may influence the ballet dancer to experience a heightened sense of “self” in performance.

It is also possible that the dancers in these works feel more strongly focused on the intrinsic elements of movement. As Hodgkinson explained, in Forsythe’s choreography, the dancer is preoccupied with the exploration of each step (“What happens if you push your heel so far forward that it becomes something else?”, cited on p. 231.) Such emphasis on the logistics and exploration of movement might prompt the dancer to focus on questions that are related to the studio work (rather than on a particular non/fictional character in a situation or story). As Van der Wyst explained, in Forsythe’s dances the intricate logistics of off-balance steps motivate the performer to focus in this direction:

Within the boundaries of kinetic energy and the way he [Forsythe] pushes that energy to the point of fall, it almost feels like a mathematical puzzle. So it was interesting to follow the movement, rather than the artistic creative themes (Van der Wyst, interview, 23 September 2010).

As these impressions indicate, more than one factor tends to influence dancers to feel as “themselves” in a leotard ballet role. It is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate what such unique correlations might imply for each individual dancer. It is also not yet known whether similar occurrences might be reported in other choreographic styles and other plotless works outside the leotard genre, where dancers also might feel as themselves in the role.

### 6.3 ISSUES SPECIFIC TO LEOTARD BALLETS: THE DANCER AND THE AESTHETICS

In the discussions so far in this chapter it was not possible to ascertain whether all the issues raised relate only to leotard ballets, or whether they could also be applicable to other dancers' experiences outside the genre. But, there are certain observed aspects that are clearly genre-specific. These primarily relate to the genre's aesthetic. As discussed in 1.4, Holly Hynes, a costume designer and a former Balanchine costume consultant for the New York City Ballet, suggested that in the spare aesthetic of leotard ballets any existing detail is more exposed and prominent (Hynes, interview, 24 October 2010). In the light of the information obtained from the interviews, this point could also be extended to dancing in leotard ballets: due to the spare aesthetic, smaller details in the dancer's interpretations become more visible. Also, the dancer may focus attention on the elements of the aesthetic that are present and visible — regardless of their potentially minute size.

For the performers in this study, some aspects of the aesthetic had more impact than others. Some intrinsic components — for example, lighting and sparse props (as in the Forsythe ballets) — did not have as powerful an effect on the performer's process as may have been expected. Even the stroboscope effect that was described by Van der Wyst (2010) in a particular production of *In the Middle Somewhat Elevated*, or dancing in the dark as in *Steptext*, was an element that the dancers felt was easy enough to adapt to. For some Forsythe dancers, for example Johnson, the lighting changes provided interesting motivational challenges but the pace of rehearsing in Frankfurt made the process comfortable.

The [dim] lighting for example in *Artifact* is tricky, because it comes from low boom, but you learn how to perform in that situation. And in Europe we had the luxury of having a lot of stage rehearsals, so ...we could get used to it. Equally, the dancers are very used to jumping into the situations and making the best of them,

so ... some of the best performances (or performances I felt were the best) were when there was an unknown element. ... Sometimes you free yourself up with far less expectation about what the performance is supposed to be (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008).

Even in Forsythe's works, where lighting design is an important aspect of performance, Johnson was a rare dancer who commented on its influence over the performer. In contrast, as discussed in 6.1, the sound (or its absence) and the music were much more relevant elements of the dance work for the dancers. As Ashley reported, dancing in a leotard "leaves you much more of a blank slate — you don't have to be, or feel, frilly or pink or green, or anything ... but yourself". The dance becomes about the performance of the music and the dynamic qualities. "And then you interpret all that in a way that seems natural to you, as an individual" (Ashley, interview, 28 October 2011).

The type of costume — a leotard or a body suit — is also mentioned as one of the key aspects for many dancers, both conceptually and in terms of the dancer's inner feeling. Caspersen (as discussed in 5.0), saw a leotard costume as a direct reference to the "particular culture and era" but also as a "simplification of the scene", where the character is de-emphasised (Caspersen, interview, 14 March 2011). Lamy felt that the combination of the costume and the setting affected how she would feel as a character. For Lamy, leotard costumes promoted "feeling like herself" because the lack of costuming details and props or decorations helped her relate to her own personal life more easily. As soon as she had "a tutu and with a tiara on" Lamy "had to" feel like someone else:

In such roles, I would have to have a persona because I would feel in a way more precious than I've ever been in my life. So, it's just automatic — I would have to elevate my state of mind to a place where I'm not normally (Lamy, interview, 15 April 2011).

Similarly, Bull felt that there was a certain transparency and “honesty” embedded in such roles, due also to this type of costume. She felt that the absence of theatrical elements and details of costuming revealed the “personality” of the performer more strongly. “People’s values and beliefs” stood out more: a daring dancer revealed herself, just as shyness or going “down the road of doing it absolutely right” transpired as a meticulous and exacting quality in performance. “You do get a sense of people’s characters, actually... Their quirkiness, or where the boundaries lie, how they feel about things” (Bull, interview 29 June, 2011). This was indeed an impression that I gained in some of the roles analysed in the case studies. In particular, there was a clear connection observed between Rodriguez’s off-stage personality (in rehearsal) and in the performance of “Tracy”, as discussed in 5.2 (pp. 172-173).

Several dancers also commented on the link between the leotard costumes and backstage experiences in their ballet culture (rehearsal, studio, ballet class). As already mentioned in the “Bransle Gay” section (4.5), Bull felt that performing a solo in this work early in her career was a comfortable step in her artistic development, as the aesthetic aspects resembled the ballet classroom (Bull, interview, 29 June 2011). Van der Wyst felt even more strongly that leotard-costume roles promoted a gentler transition between the rehearsal and performance:

When you perform in practice clothes, the transition from rehearsal to performance is almost seamless, because you really don’t rehearse in your performance costume very often. So, having that level of comfort gives your interpretation just that ease of transition. This is the case when, really, there aren’t extra layers to have to get used to between the two [a headress, a thicker costume, or some other prop] (Van der Wyst, interview, 23 September 2010).



Van der Wyst also felt that the construction and fabric of contemporary leotards promotes freedom of movement, which “in some ways increases freedom”, since “everything you felt there [backstage], you feel exactly the same here [in performance]” (interview, 23 September 2010). Former Ballett Frankfurt dancer and costume designer Stephen Galloway observed that the occasional inclusion of replicas of particular dancers’ habitual rehearsal clothing used as stage costumes in Forsythe’s choreography in Ballett Frankfurt made dancers “very happy” (Galloway, interview, 17 July 2011).

It may be also that the leotards promote the feeling of “being a dancer”, rather than a character in a real-life situation (who would likely wear a very different garment). However, practice clothes and leotards are not necessarily interchangeable terms in a ballet company. While this type of costume is used as the uniform in the professional ballet school, after the dancer joins a company, practice wear becomes quite eclectic. Therefore, as Van der Wyst notes, the dancer’s feeling in a leotard ballet role may be “contingent upon” what s/he wears in rehearsals. If the dancer rehearses in the studio in “many clothing layers”, the “smooth transition” between the studio and stage may not be experienced and the performer may feel more exposed as s/he is no longer accustomed to embodying movement in “only one layer of lycra or cotton of which a leotard can be made” (Van der Wyst, interview, 23 September 2010).

The relationship between the dancer and the leotard costume therefore seems quite complex. While this type of costume may be liberating for some, it can be taxing for others. As discussed in chapter 1, historically, dancers did not favour leotards and body suits due to the feeling of “exposure” (1.4, pp. 24-25). In my interviews with contemporary ballet dancers the issue re-emerged, as nearly all the female dancers expressed their feeling

of being exposed or uncovered. Bull, for example, even saw significance in the finer details of the design. The body exposure in a leotard is more comfortable than, for example, it is in a one-piece long body suit (the unitard), which felt even more revealing and unforgiving, leaving “nothing to tweak or hide behind”. With leotards, Bull felt, there were some elements that could be adjusted to make the dancer feel more comfortable: in *Agon* there was a belt to pull up or down, in *Steptext* the leotard could be adjusted with tailoring and thus “worn high-cut or low-cut”. In full body-tights there was nothing to customise, and one could feel “essentially naked, but with colour” (Bull, interview, 29 June 2011).

Yu observed that even today, when professional dancers ought to be used to this aesthetic and to have overcome “the barrier” of self-consciousness, in a costume so revealing it is inevitable that the performer’s stage presence “consists absolutely” of their figure. This makes them “subconsciously ... more aware of the body” during the performance (Yu, interview 23 October 2009). While the male dancers in this study did not think so much about their figures, there was still a reported feeling of exposure. As Kish explained, there is a sense that the technique is completely revealed to the spectator and the dancer may thus feel more self-aware, as “there is nothing to hide behind” (Kish, interview, 16 June 2011).

The feeling of exposure in leotards was in some measure relative to the company culture and background. In some ballet cultures, such as the New York City Ballet, for instance, later generations of Balanchine dancers “grew up” in the leotards and therefore did not feel as self-conscious as dancers from other companies might have. As Calegari expressed, “we

just grew up seeing the aesthetic and understanding the philosophy of it, where the movement was primary” (Calegari, interview, 14 December 2011).

But, as interesting as these observations and differences in the dancers’ comfort levels may have been, there was no strong impression that the feeling of self-consciousness in a leotard significantly influenced the look of the dancer’s performance. The dancers, as professionals, are used to adapting their stage presence to varying circumstances, as suggested by Yu. Equally, just as other aspects of the dancer’s approach are changeable and flexible, the feeling in a leotard costume may vacillate too. As Bull explains, feelings of confidence and self-consciousness may “fluctuate over the course of the dancer’s career”, while only rare performers would have a constant comfort level with their body shape in this type of costume (Bull, interview, 29 June 2011). According to Bull, the main power of this type of costume is in the possibility of “unconsciously setting up” an “internal feeling which colours the way one steps out onto the stage”. As such, the leotard may have implications for the dancer’s interpretation. “Depending on how you feel about your body”, this type of costume may “set one up to start the performance with a sense of vulnerability ... or from a stance of power” (Bull, interview, 29 June 2011).

#### 6.4 ADDITIONAL CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS: RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHOREOGRAPHERS

While this is not a genre-specific issue, and it is certainly not news that choreographers have a great impact over dancers and their work, the complexity of this relationship emerged as one of the clearest influences on the dancer’s approach to the roles analysed in the case studies. The question of “what the choreographer wants” in some form or another emerged in conversations with nearly all dancers across different cultures. Antonijevic

(2009), Ashley (2011), Cook (2011), Calegari (2011), Gates (2011), Johnson (2008), Konvalina (2009), Lamy (2011), Verdy (2011), and others all reported that they wanted to know the choreographer's ideas and expectations as they were developing their own approaches in specific roles. Whether or not the choreographer was directly present, the dancers' motivations or readings of the role in some way (although to varying degrees) related to how they understood the choreographer's style and/or idea for the particular ballet and variation. This issue rests on the established concept of authorship in twentieth-century ballet, where the choreographer is the single author (1.2). While as discussed in 2.1, theoretical writings now challenge this concept, it is evident that the idea of the choreographer as the sole author is still present in contemporary, twenty-first century ballet culture. This was easily observed in the repertory companies, even when the choreographer is particularly liberal in welcoming the dancers' contributions (as in the case of Forsythe).

Proximity to the choreographer also created intriguing possibilities and, it seems, greatly influenced the process and the overall shape of a dancer's performance. When working with the choreographer, the dancers often expressed an increased sense of pleasure and motivation (as with Cook in "Melancholic", p. 111, or Lamy working with Forsythe on *the second detail*, p. 196), but at the same time there was also a clear understanding of limits. For dancers who work with the choreographer directly, it is in many cases (although not in every situation) easier to assess where the choreographer's directions and ideas stop, and where their own reading begins. For example, in our discussion about "Sanguinic", Ashley explained that the choreographer's request was particularly detailed with regard to the opening phrase, yet she could change the execution of an uncomfortable step so long as the choreographer did not object (4.3, p. 124).

When the choreographer was not directly present, the advice of a cultural translator (a répétiteur or the staging expert, and sometimes the original dancer) often provided the direction. Sometimes dancers in these situations analysed the role in terms of their understanding of the choreographer's style. For example, when speaking about Forsythe's *the second detail*, Konvalina explained:

Knowing his [Forsythe's] process... he probably was not trying to create any story; it was just really execution of the steps and pacing of music ... So that approach is different. When I did *the second detail*, it was just really about knowing the technique of it and how to interpret the sound and the noise... but still I'm me, I'm myself on stage... I think I don't want to lose myself on stage. Unless that is the specific request of some of the choreographers (Konvalina, interview, 23 October 2009).

Despite this strong interest in the choreographic idea, it was apparent that the dancer's concern for authenticity did not necessarily extend to the original performance or the approach of the original performer (who was certainly directly guided by the choreographer and could provide further information about the role). The original performer's input was not a constant influence, as not all dancers consider an original performance to be the "authoritative" version. On the one hand, there is the example of Dresden Semper Oper Ballett ballerina Ana Presta, who gave a detailed explanation about relying on the guidance of the original dancer (Ballett Frankfurt's Kate Strong) while developing the "Kate" role in *the second detail*. Presta built her interpretation by referring to the comprehensive notes sent to her by the original dancer and by speaking with other performers from the Forsythe culture who had performed the role previously (Jone SanMartin, for example) (Presta, interview, 25 June 2011). These earlier interpretations by dancers who had worked closely with the choreographer helped Presta develop her own conceptual approach to the "Kate" role and increase her agency.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, some dancers felt that knowing about previous dancers' approaches might hinder their own interpretation. For example, Lamy explained that she liked to know the basic idea, "the brief" for the role: "give me steps that you want me to do". "Watching others" was not part of her preferred process:

I never looked at other videos, I always wanted to find my own interpretation of things instead of just repeating the past. So, the past to me was not as relevant as digging in my own brain as to how I could make it different — you know, how can this evolve with who I am today... Of course, originally you want to know about the choreographer, but the more I did it, the more I understood Balanchine. Then the more I could take it to my own limits. As to how far [knowing his intent] the music can inspire me: what can it inspire me to do today? Instead of [asking] what did it inspire his ballerinas in the day to do? (Lamy, interview, 15 April 2011).

The dancer's attitude towards the choreographic idea, and towards the scope of their own contribution, opens up further theoretical questions about the nature of authenticity, authorial intentionality and interpretation. While this question deserves a careful and dedicated attention, for the present study it is important to note that sometimes very different interpretations are presented by two dancers who firmly kept the choreographic idea (as they perceived it) in mind. This was observed in the "Sanguinic" interpretations (4.3) by Ashley and Tallchief, respectively. Each dancer conceptually developed different readings and painted the role with different colours, yet both stressed aspects of Balanchine's idea. Although this in itself is not unusual, in this study such differences may be increased due to Balanchine's process. As discussed throughout Chapter 4, in the Balanchine studio the dancers received very few explicit verbal explications. Balanchine's predominantly non-verbal approach may well have sent different signals to different dancers.

As established previously, those dancers who worked with Balanchine learnt to read his (often very vivid) movement demonstrations. Balanchine dancers like Ashley, Calegari, Cook and others, often explained a movement in terms of how they decoded it, through close visual observation of his movement demonstrations. While the non-verbal communication is not exclusive to Balanchine's process (in fact nowadays the dancer's training at ballet school often involves imitating and interpreting the teacher's movement), it seems that the dancers in Balanchine's proximity experienced the separation of embodied and verbal communication. This process thus had to influence the development of strong visual perception.

As the documents and interviews show, in the Forsythe company verbal communication was one of the key aspects in the process. The dancer's personal verbal propensity and linguistic aptitude was certainly welcome, but there was a cultivation of this ability in the daily work, as discussed in 3.4 (p.103). Johnson explained how the dancers "had to learn how to articulate" what they were thinking, especially as the work was improvisational and thus very individual. As she explained, Forsythe often asked the dancers to share their process with others in the studio. Consequently, since "what you're thinking maybe doesn't make sense when it gets outside of your head ... you would have to decide how you would communicate what it is that you're thinking and doing" (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008). In this study too, it was easy to discuss embodied experiences with former Ballett Frankfurt dancers. They gave elaborate verbal articulations and it seemed were very comfortable discussing their internal processes. Caspersen's published writings and her responses to my questions in the email correspondence are the example in point.

It is important to note this effect of the daily process, as it may be an indication of how the training may be expanded in other companies too. As discussed in 3.4 (pp. 104-105), Lamy's visit to the Ballett Frankfurt, where she observed the dancers' frequent use of notepads to "write down either themes, or actual parts of pieces, [as well as] their thoughts" indicates interesting links between this process and the performing style in that company. (The dance also seemed amplified, and "more daring" to Lamy, p. 105). Furthermore, the dancers' performances in *the second detail*, or Caspersen's film excerpt showing her duets in the *Artifact*, reveals what this amplified performing style looks like. Here, the idea of thriving on risk reveals "states of concentration" that utilise "unexpected possibilities" and results in strong *free-flow* effects and a unique performing style (Gilpin, 2011, 117).

It is common knowledge that dancers in international repertory ballet companies (across geographical cultures and ballet traditions) are not typically asked to verbalise their experiences during the creative process in the studio. In my observations of rehearsals in The National Ballet of Canada and of a range of classes (in Canada's National Ballet School), it was evident that the dancer's voice is still rarely heard in the ballet studio. Most of the time, the dancer works silently, perhaps occasionally asking questions when something needs to be clarified (like the execution of a particular step).<sup>8</sup> Although it is not yet clear how different approaches may affect different creative processes across the variety of ballet cultures. It was evident that speaking about embodied experiences was not easy for several dancers from the repertory companies. I often heard answers such as, "that is difficult to describe" when replying about performing in plotless roles. Sometimes, while the dancers were very open with me, their accounts were not verbally detailed, as was explained in the case of Rodriguez's performance in "Sanguinic" (4.3). But, while this



occurrence represented a deficiency in the interview (as it limited the amount of information received), on the other hand it also illuminated the range of relationships dancers may have with their different roles. Rodriguez spoke with me in much more detail about particular role in Robbins's plotless ballet (*Opus 19/The Dreamer*, 1979), but she admitted there was not as much for her to say about "Sanguinic" (as discussed in 4.3, pp. 144-145). Although she could say very little about this role, she nevertheless demonstrated an exceptionally interesting interpretation in her 2006 and 2008 performances. More research, therefore, could be used to investigate various relationships between the company culture and the daily work, and the performer's verbal articulation and different roles in various repertory companies.

Another notable finding of the interviews was that, although all the interviews focused equally tightly on the dancers' particular solos (see Appendix 2), dancers in choreographers' resident companies were more inclined to view their roles in the broader context of the entire ballet. For example, Balanchine dancers Ashley and Cook extended the discussion of their solos to include the notion of "theme and variation" in the whole of *The Four Temperaments* (4.2-4.3), and Verdy discussed the distinctions between "Bransle Gay" and the partnered dances, such as the "Bransle Double" (4.5). Some dancers even observed links between their current leotard ballet role and other ballets in the Balanchine opus. For example, both Calegari and Cook referred to *Apollo* while discussing their respective roles in *Agon* (4.5). Forsythe's dancers often observed the theme of *épaulement* or "focus and disfocus" (5.1), and related their given role to different sections of *The Loss of Small Detail*.

This type of contextualisation across the choreographic repertoire was less commonly observed in the interviews with repertory company dancers. Some, including Forskitt (2011) and Presta (2011), did compare their performances in *the second detail* to other works in the Forsythe repertoire, but did not mention the relationships between particular themes or phrases to their other roles. The dancers tended to specifically refer to their own part in the given ballet. The most extreme example was found in a discussion of *the second detail*, where two dancers from different international productions explained that they could not recognise a very strong opening of the “Kate” solo because of the particularly difficult movement coordination in their ensemble section <sup>9</sup> (Kish, interview 16 June 2011 and Presta, interview 25 June 2011).

On the other hand, however, repertory company dancers could observe links between various choreographic repertoires more easily. A former repertory company dancer, Gates, who was interviewed for her experiences in Ballet Frankfurt in Forsythe roles, explained that she could recognise similarities between dance movements in Balanchine and Forsythe works. As Gates explained, although Forsythe never verbally made references to Balanchine’s works she could feel them in an embodied way. “I have danced enough of Balanchine so those movements were already in my body at that time.”<sup>10</sup> Gates explain that sometimes her body would feel a citation, or a familiar movement reference: “I would feel them. Your body goes on recall — ‘Oh, I have been in this place before’” (Gates, interview, 31 August 2011). In this sense, it is equally interesting to explore what contributions the work may receive when it is performed by different groups of dancers who have different levels of understanding of various choreographic approaches.

## 6.5 THE PERFORMER'S CONTRIBUTION: DANCERS' PERCEPTIONS

One of the broadest questions raised with the dancers was about the kinds of contributions they had hoped to make within a choreographic work. As with the other influences discussed in previous sections, the dancers' thinking about their own role as contributors is contingent upon multiple personal and cultural factors. As established, ballet dancers are greatly influenced by their relationships with the choreographer and by their perceptions of the choreographic idea, as they decode or understand it. It is notable, however, to observe the dancers' perceptions about the freedom they should take with the role. In this respect there are differences between different company cultures.

As observed previously, repertory company dancers tend to view their role as situated in a particular choreographic style or repertory, although they may think of it quite liberally within this construct. This is exemplified by the interview with Konvalina in relation to Forsythe's work (p.233), and in the way that Lamy described "originally" wanting "to know about the choreographer" but that "the more I understood Balanchine ... the more I could take it to my own limits" (p. 234). During the fieldwork, it was interesting to observe that the relationship of repertory company dancers with their solo parts developed very gradually. It was apparent that the dancers' own performing style does not even emerge until later rehearsals. At first, dancers are preoccupied with learning the steps, the style of dance movement and the overall choreographic style. Only once they are comfortable with the choreographer and the style of the dance work does their own imprint and agency emerge. In the case of the repertory dancers observed, the performers' personal contributions were visible either during the last stages of rehearsals, or in performance.

The ideas about the dancer's own contribution and the relationship to the perceived choreographic idea was particularly strong in some dancers' opinions, more than in others. Comparatively, an increased level of submersion in the choreographic idea emerged in the discussions with the Balanchine dancers. These performers aimed to maintain as close a correlation as possible with the choreographer's idea. The personal contribution of a Balanchine dancer was perceived as relevant and interesting not for its own sake, but only if it conformed to and highlighted the choreography. For example, Cook made a comparison between the ballet dancer's role and that of an interpreter of classical music. Both could offer an "enormous contribution" but equally may become an "enormous distraction" (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011). Cook explained that his role as a performer in Balanchine's work was to amplify the choreographer's "voice" rather than his own: "I would magnify the voice that I heard, not the one that I had". Cook's interview implied that a subtler agency was considered more virtuous, while more assertive readings by the dancer might be considered to be egotistical:

When Balanchine said, "I have no stars and it's about the choreography", there is a big clue. Big clue. Plug yourself into the idea that was dictated through the music and become stars through it. Become its star. Not your own star (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).

Calegari offered a similar explanation of "how a true Balanchine dancer thinks about performing":

We are not really "performing"; we are listening and thinking about his [Balanchine's] intention, and then we are trying to deliver it. And... the reason you are probably liking my performance... is because that's what I was trying to do. So it's not really about me. It's about holding that idea of his musically in my head, and then letting it translate through my body. ... And this doesn't have to do with adding on things, or being something, or anything like that... That's the true nature of abstract: the [choreographic] intention is informing the performance (Calegari, interview, 14 December 2011).

These conversations highlight the importance given to extending the ideas and "the voice"

of Balanchine through dancers' performances. That said, it is also well documented that Balanchine was flexible enough to allow significant agency in his dancers (as shown in 4.0, various films of his dancers, and in the interviews with Bentley (2005), Daniel (1978), Newman (1982), for example). Verdy noted the complex relationship between Balanchine and his dancers, explaining how the choreographer indeed dictated the scope of the choreography, but also greatly relied on the performer's input. She offers the analogy of the dancer as the "decorator" of a "building being made": the performer "reserves" personal commentary on the role "until the building is made" — and only "then you go for the decoration... But not before you know the building" (Verdy, interview, 9 October 2011).

First you [the dancer] get the material... you cherish those steps, you make them look as good as possible, and then — because of what the music tells you, because it was included by Balanchine into the steps and you recognise it — you take it in for yourself. Only then you can begin to inevitably show your personality. But you are not trying to exhibit it before the time... You knew that he needed a certain contribution from you, and in the process you would suddenly realise what kind of contribution you were being asked for (Verdy, interview, 9 October 2011).

The Ballett Frankfurt dancers speaking about the performer's contribution in Forsythe ballets leave a very different impression. As Noah Gelber, a former Ballett Frankfurt dancer and a current staging expert of Forsythe's work explained in a published interview, in ballets such as *the second detail*, the dancers use Forsythe's choreography "as a catalyst to present their own movement" (Gelber, in Het Nationale Ballet, 2012, online). This leaves a very different impression about the scope of the dancer's contribution, albeit in a very different era and company culture. Forsythe himself in a published interview indicated the negotiated space between his authority and that which is left wide open for the dancer. He speaks in terms of the dancers' "responsibility" to insert their own ideas. This expectation in performance does not seem exclusive to those dancers who work directly with Forsythe:

I look for situations that allow dancers to assume responsibility. They are responsible for aspects of the choreography just as I am responsible for the mode of deriving it. I make a proposal and I understand that this proposal can generate a certain kind of information just depending on what your references are (Forsythe, Sadlers Wells Screen, 2010, online).

In Forsythe's resident culture, dancers contemplate their own agency in a more expansive frame, in comparison with both Balanchine dancers and dancers from repertory companies. As an illustration, Johnson noted a major difference she felt after joining Ballett Frankfurt from the National Ballet of Canada. In the new company there was no sense of suppressing her own ideas to conform to the choreographer's. She had no impression that the choreographic idea was more important than her own expression.

It wasn't that the idea was more important than I was. I definitely felt like me on stage. We worked in tandem, the ideas and my dancing spirit-self. So I felt very invigorated. You really felt like you'd accomplished something at the end of that (Johnson, interview, 30 December 2008).

Caspersen offered a detailed and complex explanation about the role of a dancer in Forsythe's choreography. This is very useful to fully appreciate the levels of reading that exist between the two contributors in this repertoire — the performer and the choreographer. As it may be seen from Caspersen's explication, the performer in Forsythe's works develops an equally strong relationship with the dance work, but in this case by building individual responses to several "sets of conditions" that are both intrinsic and extrinsic:

A work is always choreographed within an environment that is composed of nested sets of conditions: both those that exist independently of humans, such as gravity or the passage of the sun, and those that we create, such as law or social customs. A performer, then, is working within a set of conditions, that exists within a set of conditions, and creates a new set of conditions for themselves, in each performance, in order to make the piece come alive.

For example, let's say in response to what is around them, someone decides to make a choreography where the conditions include:

- Using only balletic vocabulary
- Doing it upside down
- Being inside of a 1.5 metre high box that is only visible through cameras

Then, the performer is there inside the box, with that specific material, and needs to decide on the set of conditions that will be effective within these parameters. The conditions they choose might involve, for example, decisions about:

- Tempo
- Quality of motion
- Organization or alteration of existing material
- Techniques for creating new material from the given information
- Emotional shading
- Their own story about what is happening

I think part of the work of a performer is to take the conditions and the complex chains of relationship that make up a piece — chains that are not always evident or conscious — and through these chains connect themselves to their environment. They connect themselves to the audience, the other performers, their own life, the country they are in, all those things — in a way that allows the generative tensions that make a piece live to be engaged. Similar to what I mentioned in relationship to *2nd Detail*, the visible aspects of a work — what you see or hear on the stage, or wherever the work takes place — are not its origin. There is a welter of forces that give a work its power and most of them are unspoken. The performer connects to those forces and rides the tensions in them to create the temporal and formal shape of the piece. They do this by investigating the situation they are in with an attitude of rigor and curiosity.

I think this kind of work is also possible for dancers from other companies performing Bill's repertoire. I wouldn't say that they are co-authoring the piece, the piece pre-exists. Instead, they are creating that particular instance of it (Caspersen, email correspondence, 14 March 2011).

Thus, it is the performer's role to interpret choreographic tasks by contributing notably within partially pre-determined frameworks. Caspersen's explanation of the dancer's role in Forsythe's work also implicitly touches upon several aspects discussed elsewhere in this thesis, including the notion of the instantiation of the dance work (McFee, 2011 in 2.1): the dancers "are creating" a particular instance of the dance work. She also invokes the discussion of the concept of the dancer's habitus (3.0): the performer is working within a tighter set of conditions, which are framed by pre-existing social conditions "that we

create, such as law and social customs”. We can also recognise the concept of action and agency (2.1): the performer makes decisions based on more than one available course of action (Giddens, 1984). As Caspersen finds, the dancers “need to decide on the set of conditions that will be effective” within the given parameters”, and ultimately, as she explained above, “make the “piece come alive”.

## 6.6 THE DANCER’S CONTRIBUTION IN LEOTARD BALLETS FROM THE SPECTATOR’S PERSPECTIVE

Analysing the dancers’ performances from my point of view as a spectator, the relationship between the dancer and the dance seems even more complex than was initially anticipated at the start of the thesis. It is not possible, nor was it the aim of the research, to identify a single concept that would fully explain the dancer’s contribution, even in the few leotard ballets studied through the case studies. The examples revealed that dancers find a wide range of ways to contribute and that very often their approaches materialise into visible effects, influencing movement qualities that can be seen in the dance. In Cook’s thoughts about, and the performance of, “Melancholic”, some aspects of his conceptualisations can be perceived by both the dancer and the viewer alike, but others were not visible to the viewer. In other examples, there is a great correlation between what the dancer planned to do and what the viewer saw; and in some cases an effect was seen, but was not understood until it was illuminated by the dancer, as in the case of Ashley’s “Sanguinic”. In other cases, certain strong effects observed in the same dance were either fully conceptualised by the dancer or were not contemplated at all: the respective performances by Ashley and Rodriguez in “Sanguinic” exemplify this point.



Verbal eloquence was revealing of a dancer's culture, but did not necessarily reflect the quality of the performance. The fact that the dancer's performance brings out interesting, visible effects was more important than whether the dancer could speak in detail about the process or performance (as shown in the case of Rodriguez, 4.3). The dancer is not required to speak about the performance. Her/his performance speaks for itself. But those dancers who did speak revealed much more about the interesting aspects of their processes and performances and, when present, the information about the dancer's perceptions and the conceptualisations behind the work simply serves to illuminate more aspects that are immediately visible. When this extra information is not present, it may be prudent to revisit Kirsh's exploration of the dancer's body as a "cognitive medium", which found that dancers do not always think in straightforwardly verbal terms (2.3, pp. 49-50). This finding may in fact point out the very uniqueness of the relationship between the dancer and the dance work. As dance is an inherently embodied medium, it makes sense that multiple approaches and positive values emerge immediately through the body and do not necessarily manifest themselves verbally or as the result of conscious planning.

Dennett considered the phenomenon of "unconscious perceptual events" that occur in "the course of normal behavior control" to be the result of complex combinations of pre-existing knowledge and chains of events (Dennett, 1991, 308).

Suppose you tip over your coffee cup on your desk. In a flash, you jump up from the chair, narrowly avoiding the coffee that drips over the edge. You were not conscious of thinking that the desk top would not absorb the coffee, or that coffee, a liquid obeying the law of gravity, would spill over the edge, but such unconscious thoughts must have occurred — for had the cup contained table salt, or the desk been covered with a towel, you would not have leaped up. Of all your beliefs — about coffee, about democracy, about baseball, about the price of tea in China — these and a few others were immediately relevant to your circumstances, if we are to cite them in an explanation of why you leaped up, they must have been momentarily accessed or activated or in some way tapped for a contribution to your behavior [sic], but of course this happened unconsciously (Dennett, 1991,

Dennett's concept of extremely fast, momentarily-accessed or activated pre-existing tacit knowledge that informs our conscious and unconscious decisions may recall the earlier discussions of Bourdieu's habitus as a field of action structured from internalised knowledge that an agent can draw on in a given situation (3.0). It also resonates with Giddens's concept of agency (2.1, pp. 37-38) where the ability to act, rather than being a conscious intention or the volition to make an effect, is the key to the action. Agency, as a theoretical term, is both fitting and flexible enough to explain and accommodate the various effects observed in the two case studies. The effects apparent in Cook's performance were not the ones he intended to make. In contrast, the intentional effects planned in Forskitt's, Ashley's, and Tallchief's ideas, as well as Konvalina's in "Melancholic", Calegari's in "Bransle Gay", Lamy's in "Tracy", and Bull's in the *Steptext* solo, all clearly transpired on stage. Finally, we also witnessed the unplanned or unconscious, but visible, effects created by Rodriguez in the "Sanguinic" variation, and the unintentional effect of vulnerability infused into the role of "Nora" by Fournier.

On this basis, it is clear that agency is an exceptionally useful concept in the exploration of the dancer's contribution, but it should not be used exclusively. There seem to be other concepts embedded in the broader field of the dancer's action, as well as other elements that are already established in dance scholarship. The internalised embodied knowledge that results from various types of cultural and vocational training — all part of the dancer's habitus — also transpires in the dancer's thinking about their particular role, and in numerous other ways in the shape of the performer's personal performing style (Armelagos and Sirridge, 1984, and Morris, 2000).

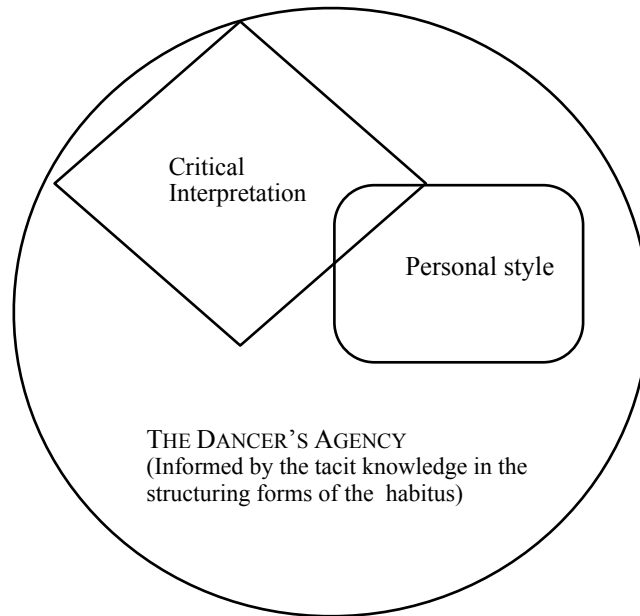


FIG. 6.0 PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR THE DANCER'S CONTRIBUTION IN LEOTARD BALLETS

The dancer's performing style can therefore be considered one aspect of the dancer's broader agency. Based on the analyses in this research, I believe that the style, as a concept, is not sufficient in itself to accommodate the multifarious aspects of the cognitive aspects and various relationships between conceptualisations and effects in performance. It is also possible that the agency of the performer in some cases may include an element of "critical interpretation" (2.1, p.41-42). Thom's (2003) concept of "critical interpretation" in performance may be associated with conceptual readings that produce obvious effects, changing some outward aspect of the dance work. For example, the concept of critical interpretation may be applicable to Konvalina's performances in "Melancholic", Ashley's performance in "Sanguinic", and Forskitt's interpretation of off-balance sections and the social aspects in the "Nora" solo. But it would be difficult to find "critical reading" in those performances in which the observed effects are not intended or planned by the dancer. Just as Dennett's jumping away from the spilled coffee does not necessarily imply critical

thinking, so the unplanned actions and “unconscious thoughts” that are aspects of agency, or are possibly part of the performer’s personal style, cannot be viewed as “critical interpretations”. The idea presented in fig. 6.0, therefore, should be seen as a fluid concept, just as the modes of the dancer’s contributions and ideas are changeable and porous (as explained in 6.1). Agency may thus inform the particular effects observed in dancers’ approaches, but aspects of agency (for example cognitive ideas) may increase or decrease depending on the fluctuations in their view of a role and the various ways in which this may influence their performances throughout their career.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

<sup>1</sup> Later in the conversation Calegari clarified the image of the warmer flame, as the “gold flame” in *Agon*.

<sup>2</sup> There are interesting debates in the film theory about the documentary film as a genre of storytelling. For example, discussing the politics of the documentary genre from the perspective of women studies Paula Rabinowitz warns us that the documentary narrative “depends on the power of the gaze to construct meanings... Furthermore, the two terms — documentary, narrative — remain at odds with each other. Insisting on a particularity of vision and a polemic, yet requiring the conventions of plot and structure, reportage is a “bastard” genre” (Rabinowitz, 1994, *They Must be Represented: The Politics of Documentary*, London and New York: Verso, p.51).

<sup>3</sup> When he was cast in the “Saraband”, Cook felt that *Agon* was “the epitome of neoclassicism” and he used this idea to build his role. “There was the use of épaulement, efface and the issue of games in *Agon*. So I did my best to look my best.” But, as Cook explains, Balanchine’s feedback was: “It’s too beautiful dear.” To demonstrate to Cook, Balanchine showed him the movement phrase: “He stood up, and he put his hand on his nose, like it was a big nose, and then he bent his wrist, and he was suddenly a jester with bells on a hat. ... And then he demonstrated the rhythm it’s with a cutting ronde de jamb, very low to the floor, and very syncopated. He did it as if it were a tap dance. How a ... fencing master would do the movement, with a lunge and do the joust with the arm.” In comparison, said Cook reflecting on his own original approach, “I was doing it as if I was Prince Sigfried” (Cook, interview, 9 December 2011).

<sup>4</sup> In Bal’s theory there is a much more complex relationship also between these “character-effects” and the story. She explains that ties that exist between the character and the narrative may then create more complexity. For example, the “character-effect” may be amplified through the context of a story allusion through which it is presented (Bal, 2009, 114).

<sup>5</sup> “However narrative a text may appear to some, a lack of narrative drive can always threaten the text’s narrativity. For some, the action and dialogue of a love scene may disappear entirely in favor of contemplating the portrait of a beautiful woman or an attractive man” (Altman, 2008, 20).

<sup>6</sup> As explored in his curatorial project *Altermodernism*, presented at Tate Britain in 2009, Bourriaud declares “docu-fiction” as one of the core aspects of the current culture (which is denoted by Bourriaud as “altermodernity”-- a “new reality” shaped by the post-globalised aspects of multiculturalism and the global expansion of the internet, particularly after 2000). His theory is elaborated in the subsequent book *The Radicant*, (2009) which explores how cultural globalisation as a phenomenon affects aesthetic forms.

<sup>7</sup> In this instance, Candeloro finds a similar device in the fictional yet quasi-documentary style of Sergei Eisenstein's *Potemkin* (1925).

<sup>8</sup> Of the four works I observed in rehearsals, only one required that dancers speak with the choreographer during the process in the studio -- a method used by former Ballett Frankfurt dancer Crystal Pite during the creation of her 2009 ballet *Emergence*.

<sup>9</sup> At this point in the ballet, all dancers, including the previous soloists are in the ensemble performing the "Hula" dance. Presta described different experiences as the member of ensemble in this section, and subsequently as the new performer of the "Kate" role. "In *the second detail* I have been doing the different roles...and from these 'technical,' classical parts I went on to do this solo. I had about twenty-five minutes of waiting before my ["Kate"] entrance. And the first time I was performing it, I was sweating in the wings all that time — because you hear this music, and it is powerful ... But then I remembered when I was doing those other roles, I didn't ever realise there was a girl around who comes out in the end ["Kate"]. You are so engaged into the physicality of the choreography... So that time in the wings, I said 'Wow! Now I'm there, and they don't even realise it!'" (Presta, interview, 25 June 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Prior to dancing in Ballett Frankfurt, Gates was a principal dancer from Joffrey Ballet and Pennsylvania Ballet. The later company nurtured particularly strong ties to Balanchine, since its inception in 1963 under directorship of Balanchine's former dancer, Barbara Weisberger.

## CONCLUSIONS

This thesis explored the role of contemporary ballet dancers and the scope of their contributions in plotless ballets, focusing in particular on a selection of choreographies by George Balanchine and William Forsythe. In this thesis these works were analysed as part of the lineage of leotard ballet, a sub-genre of plotless dance. Ballet dancers were not approached as passive subjects, but as important contributors who, in their own words and actions, illuminated their unique processes, ideas and creative approaches. The methodology was thus devised to provide a dialogic analytical space, inclusive of both external (spectator's) analysis and insider (dancers') perspectives. In this sense, the study brings to light the links and differences between ballet performers' ideas and the spectator's perception of the dance. Through this process, the key similarities and contrasts between these two perspectives are also revealed.

The research began with questions about the nature of the dancer's contribution in the (later) twentieth-century leotard ballets. As discussed in 1.2-1.5, this topic is complicated by the framework of ballet authorship established in the early twentieth century, where the choreographer became positioned as the key author and authority over the dance. At the beginning of the research process, the question of the ballet performer's role was considered from various angles: through the theoretical perspective of spectators (2.1), embodied research by practitioners (2.2), as well as by looking into studies that combine both these angles (2.3). Mindful of this existing research in the field, the study was then framed as a type of meeting place that facilitates an analytical dialogue between the perspectives of the spectator and the performer (2.4-2.5). In an attempt to avoid the common bias towards theoretical

explications, the dancers' approaches to the selected roles were explored empirically, by looking at their creative processes in rehearsals, and by viewing the performance documents and live events through the lens of Laban theory (2.6). The dancer's voice and perspective were integrated using the information obtained through qualitative interviews (2.7-2.8).

The performances were viewed in the context of their specific ballet cultures. The totality of underlying internalised knowledge that influences the dancer's contribution is viewed as a part of the dancer's personal habitus (after Bourdieu's concept, 3.0). In this thesis, habitus is understood as an active, fluid, structural field that includes multiple facets of active dance training (3.1-3.3) and social learning within company cultures. The company culture is understood as a particular working environment (3.4), in which the dancer's personal and professional life develops.

Different performing contributions in specific solo roles from two distinctive choreographic styles were analysed through two separate choreographic case studies (Chapters 4 and 5). Learning about the ballet performances with access to the thoughts and ideas behind them helped uncover detailed information about the various performing approaches to dances in Balanchine and Forsythe repertoires. Although it is not new to us that the dancer has an important impact on the spectator's perceptions of the dance text, this study contributes to the field with particular attention paid to the qualitative aspects of the performer's contribution. The research in this sense focused on questions as to how the dancer conceptualises a role in a leotard ballet, and how this interpretation further influences the viewer's understanding of the dance. The key aspects of the extensive observations made in both case studies were then synthesised

into the prevailing concepts and themes highlighted in Chapter 6. In addition to reassessing and refining the main research findings, Chapter 6 also opened up significant new questions and avenues for future explorations.

Among the most important overall conclusions of this study is the notion that the ballet dancer's contribution in plotless works, although often perceived as a set of secondary qualities, creates significant impacts. The combined, discursive methodological approach taken throughout the research provides a framework for fuller theoretical insight into the qualitative relationship between the ballet dancers and the dance texts. This would not have been possible working from the singular perspective of the spectator. As a result, the thesis offers the idea that the dancer's contribution in leotard ballets should be seen as a very complex set of culturally conditioned, conscious and/or unintended qualities and actions. The dance examples in Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrated that the performer's individual imprint in practice clothes roles need not always be formally conceptualised or intentional on the part of the dancer, in order to be effective. As elaborated in 6.6, this view of the dancer's complex contribution most fully aligned with a multifaceted and multilayered idea of "agency" (after Giddens, 1984). It is argued that this agency comprises several elements that combined, and possibly in various proportions during the performer's career, shape her or his contribution.

Another result of this research has to do with demonstrating the value of the analytical approach that centres on the dancer's work. Although in the study I had concentrated my attention on the dancer's role, I found out that a significant depth of information about the choreographic work itself emerges through observation of what it communicates when it is embodied by different dancers. Furthermore, although the



thesis centred on details of individual performing events (rather than on dances as texts), and focused on isolated segments (solos), rather than on full choreographic material, much was learnt about the individual ballets as choreographic works. The solos as fragments and particular choreographic highlights, as is evident from the analyses in Chapters 4 and 5, greatly contribute to the works as whole choreographic entities through the exploratory qualities they facilitate. In this sense, by looking at the solos and how they change from the performance of one dancer to the next, more is understood about the specific choreographic works, and about the art of the two choreographers too.

The thesis contributes by observing the connections between the dancer's professional and artistic work in several important ballet cultures. It reveals influences that the cultural environment may have on the dancer's creative work, conceptualisation of the role and performance. Several new connections between the cultural context (including aspects of dance training) and the dancer's creative approaches have emerged, including the correlation between the dance culture and the dancers' perceptions of their own artistic role and license (3.3-3.4, and 6.5).

Furthermore, analysing the context of the performer's work in conjunction with the outcome of the performance revealed even deeper insights about how these works become actualised. For instance, looking collectively at sections 3.4 (the importance of the company culture) and 5.0-5.3 (the analysis of Forsythe's *the second detail*), it becomes clear how, and why, dancers in different performing environments have developed distinctive discursive practices in their individual interpretations of the same movement material. The strength of the choreography was thus more readily apparent

when it was observed through the various angles and approaches of different cultural groups to the same dance texts. (For example, as demonstrated in 5.0-5.3, in the same ballet, *the second detail*, Ballett Frankfurt dancers discussed the idea of épaulement and the related trajectory from “focus to disfocus,” whereas the repertory company dancers investigated “the double challenge” of dancing solos while remaining a part of the group.)

The thesis also contributes to the field of dance studies by demonstrating the value of looking at the selected works as part of a specific ballet type (leotard ballet). The analytical framework of this thesis also defined the parameters of the genre of practice-clothes leotard ballets, and discussed its distinctive aspects and issues (1.4). While the form of practice-clothes leotard ballets is already recognised in the field, it has not until now been analysed as a separate type with its own lineage and distinct aesthetic attributes. The value of looking at the works in this study as part of this genre lies in the revelation that the many dancers find specific challenges or benefits in this aesthetic environment (6.3).

Beyond its academic contributions, these research findings may be of considerable benefit to those in the dance and ballet professions. For example, the study shows how dancers use aspects of their training as a creative tool, and how their social environment can also be utilised to enrich their performance. Those in the dance profession may be particularly interested in the finding that the contemporary ballet training provides the dancer with more facility than purely technical and aesthetic knowledge. This study shows that ballet training is a multifaceted, culturally conditioned, and an on-going

social and artistic process of learning that extends far beyond the dancer's time in the ballet school (Chapter 3).

Furthermore, répétiteurs and staging experts may find that the approach used in this study — the analysis of dances through specific performances rather than as choreographic texts — provides some useful and illuminating perspectives on certain elements of their work. For example, by learning how dancers' interpretations continue to develop and expand in subsequent performances, and how different performing approaches are understood by the spectator, these professionals may see their previous work in a new light. The dancers, too, could use this research practically, as a self-reflective tool that shares feedback about the spectators' perceptions of the fine details of their performance.

Along with these general, core conclusions there is also a number of more specific conclusions, as well as areas opened for future research. These are outlined in the following sections.

## 7.1 THE GENRE-SPECIFIC FINDINGS

The study viewed plotless ballet as a self-standing dance form, one which fully emerged in the twentieth century (although its roots can be observed much earlier, as discussed in 1.2-1.3). The thesis shares a detailed insight into the sub-genre and lineage of practice-clothes leotard ballet. For example, the distinctive austere visual aesthetic in these works is viewed through the mode of abstraction after Osborne's semantic abstraction type (1.1), where the information about the subject matter is seen as under-emphasised, in order to accentuate the "formal properties of the work itself" (Osborne, 1976a,

246-250). The dances are discussed as “plotless”, which refers to the diminished unified story-lines and the absence of “characters” (as discussed in Bal, 2009 and Altman, 2008).

Four important, internationally performed ballets were examined as representative of this aesthetic: Balanchine’s *The Four Temperaments* and *Agon* (in Chapter 4), and Forsythe’s *the second detail* and *Steptext* (in Chapter 5). Although the choreographers did not necessarily affiliate these works with any type, such as the “leotard ballet”, there were clear benefits in viewing these works within a genre-specific context: their aesthetics presented a very specific set of motivations and challenges that impact on ballet performers and their contributions, both phenomenally and conceptually (6.3).

For example, there was a general feeling among the dancers interviewed that, due to the sparse visual appearance of these works, the dancer’s relationship to the elements that are present — particularly the music, movement and costume — is enhanced. A variety of different aspects was mentioned: some dancers reported feeling like “themselves” on stage, some conveyed something personal about themselves, and others found the freedom to indulge in their own imagined themes and situations (6.1-6.2). The intrinsic aesthetic of the leotard ballet, especially the costumes, reminded some dancers of back-stage processes (Van der Wyst, 2010), and the ballet classroom (Bull, 2011). Sometimes the actual performances were linked directly to the back-stage process (as in the case of Rodriguez in “Tracy,” 5.2). Several performers used the opportunities to communicate personal “documentary narratives” through these roles. This is made easier when there are no dramatic characters or stories portrayed in the dance and there is anyway no requirement to act or feel differently from how dancers do in their everyday lives

(Lamy, interview, 15 April 2011). In many cases, the dancers perceived their leotard ballet roles as open-ended and freeing; the dancer could be a “blank slate” (Ashley, interview, 28 October 2011).

The thesis did not aspire to provide a catalogue of the dancers’ ideas and strategies in their leotard roles. As explained in Chapter 6, the approaches and conceptualisations that emerged as contributions in performance are fluid, dynamic and porous. The ideas are sometimes ambiguous, they often overlap, and some qualities are relevant only in the short-term, or are specific to particular performances. Nonetheless, sets of similar ideas could be grouped together for clarity of observation, and presented almost as a scale of different degrees and modes of abstract or narrative exploration (6.1).

The dancer’s own feelings about the costumes were also specific to the genre: some dancers felt exposed, while others felt that their movement was freer, and that not so many adjustments in the creative process were needed between the rehearsal and performance (6.3). It was interesting, however, that the level of comfort with the costume on, whether perceived as a challenge or a benefit, did not greatly impact on the spectator’s perception of the dance. None of the dancers in this research seemed particularly uncomfortable on stage, which suggests that, while the impact of the costume is aesthetic, conceptual and may affect the dancer internally, this does not strongly manifest itself as an effect in the performance.

## 7.2 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS: THE COMBINED APPROACH

One of the major conclusions of this study is that an integration of the perspectives of

the spectator and the performer significantly deepens our understanding of the ballet dancer's contribution. Throughout the research, these perspectives have been in constant dialogue with each other. Beyond this premise, distinct micro-methodologies were applied at different stages of the research, and these elicited different types of data. For example, the early stages of the research focused on understanding the dancers and their cultures and thus, whenever possible, I engaged in field observations (predominantly in the National Ballet of Canada and Canada's National Ballet School) and partial participation (as in Pite's workshop, 2.8). I held just a few interviews during this earlier stage of the research, but these few served as opportunities to gain a broader knowledge about the differences between company cultures and working methods, rather than revealing many details about the particular roles.

During the middle stage of the research I studied many of the performance recordings, often using Laban's methods (both *Motif writing* and *effort* analysis). There was also more studio observation at this stage, sometimes focusing on the dancers' training and sometimes deliberately watching rehearsals of works that were not included in the main analysis, in order to observe possible differences in the process. Although the benefits of close observation of movement are well known, the movement analysis was particularly appropriate and useful in the conditions of leotard ballet's spare aesthetic, where the small details of movement stand out more visibly. Due to its compact shorthand possibilities, the *effort* analysis was also very useful during the ethnographic observations and the viewing of live performances. Furthermore, the details observed through movement analysis often pointed to much larger questions about the relationship between the dancer and the dance work, and between what the dancer intends (or does not intend) to do and what the spectator sees in the performance. To

this effect, the information from the movement analysis could be juxtaposed with the ethnographic notes and, in conjunction, these two elements often clarified important points, moments of change, or influences in the process, such as the stager's comments, or the dancer's attitude or working process in the studio. For logistical reasons, several interviews were conducted at this middle stage, mainly with dancers from the National Ballet of Canada in Toronto, where I lived at that time. Nonetheless, these interviews took place following some relevant movement observation of either rehearsals or live performance.

The majority of the interviews, however, were conducted in the last stage of research, after the extensive movement analysis had been completed (and also after I had moved to London). As they were informed by many details about the dancer's approach, these late conversations were very revealing, often releasing interesting information about the decision-making behind the dancers' movement observed in the analysis. The method of close movement analysis prior to interviewing thus provided me with very specific, pointed questions to do with identifying particular steps, gestures or details of musical phrasing. Asking specific questions about the details also helped significantly in bringing the performer closer to their embodied experiences in situations of distant memories, when, as Bull explained, it felt as though the dancers were remembering the past as if looking "through a shower curtain" (interview, 29 June 2011). In some cases, these conversations illuminated particular aspects that I observed through the movement analysis, but could not fully understand (as in the case of Ashley's detailed explanations of the "turning phrase" and the "cakewalk step" in "Sanguinic", 4.3).

This effect of enhancing the dancer's recollections of past performances was best

achieved when it was possible to hold a conversation while viewing the film recording together with the performer. Unfortunately, as most recordings were confined to archives or viewing libraries, this approach was often impractical. However, when it was possible to employ this method — as in the 2011 interview with Forskitt — many additional points and recollections emerged. Forskitt, for example, pointed out extra sections where she identified her own contributions, as for example in the “Nora” opening walk (5.3). In some cases, the performers were familiar with their films (as in the case of Ashley, Calegari and Cook and their films from the *Dance in America* series, Ardolino and Brockway, 1977 and 1983). This also greatly helped with discussions of particular details of performance in greater depth. Therefore, whenever possible, other researchers may find great benefits from opting to use familiar, more widely available recordings (when more than one recording is available), as there is a greater chance that the interviewee is more familiar with these too.

Thus, the dancers’ recollections of past embodied experiences were heightened and improved through very focused and detailed questions, and familiarity with the performance records was very beneficial. These later-stage interviews, however, would not have been possible without going through all the preceding stages, including the initial field observation and the broader culturally-focused interviews. This is why I describe the methodology as a constant discourse between these two perspectives. This dialogue, combined with the layering of information obtained during the various stages of the research, produced the questions and findings presented in Chapter 6.



### 7.3 ANALYSING THE DANCE THROUGH THE PERFORMANCE OF SOLOS

The study showed that the dancer's approach to one, smaller part of the whole plotless dance (such as the solo) can shift the perception of the entire ballet. The method of examining solos as fragments of the whole work proved an interesting approach to understanding the dancer's influence over a dance work. It may be that the solos, although often very brief fragments of the work, are by their nature prominent and possibly more memorable to the spectator, than is the case with the larger, group sections. Even subtle shifts in the interpretation of the solo thus might re-position the whole work for the viewer. In Chapter 4 (4.2), for example, it was found that two different interpretations of "Melancholic" (by Cook and Konvalina respectively) made the spectator notice the progression of the music and the dance in two distinctive ways. (As discussed on pp. 129-130, Cook's performance emphasised the finale of the solo and the musical crescendo, while Konvalina created a sense of suspense earlier, in the middle of the dance thus strongly alerting the spectator to the change between the adage and allegro sections.)

These differences, as products of dancers' conceptualisations, were achieved through the subtle changes in movement qualities and in attitude towards other dancers on stage. Furthermore, some interpretations (Cook in "Melancholic", 4.2 and Ashley in "Sanguinic", 4.3) particularly drew out connections with other parts of the ballet by addressing the concept of "theme and variations" that is of particular importance for the entire work. In the Forsythe examples, different approaches to "Nora" (5.3) revealed different aspects of the ballet — the theme of community was emphasised (or de-

emphasised). One performance in particular (by Forskitt) created unexpected links between different sections of the ballet (“Nora” and “Kate”), thus opening potentials for new readings of the whole work.

Focus on the role of the performer in this study also revealed that the method of looking at the dance through performing events embodied by the different dancers is useful to understand many more details about the dance text itself. As the analyses showed, one of the strengths of the two choreographic styles in this study is that they encourage various approaches by different dancers. Understanding of the choreography analysed in Chapters 4 and 5 was often enriched through the approach by different dancers who discovered new areas and explored them through individual interpretations. For example, it was through the approaches of Ashley and Tallchief in Balanchine’s “Sanguinic” (4.3), or the musical revelations by the dancing approaches of Calegari and Whelan in *Agon* (4.5), that the complexities of Balanchine’s choreography were in full evidence. Similarly, in Forsythe’s work, Bull showed us how the same material functions as a field of multiple explorations, opening up new issues and possibilities for the same dancer over time (5.5). Gates and Lamy in different approaches to “Tracy” (5.2), as well as several dancers in the “Nora” role (5.3), showed us how the movement material of a plotless dance offers wide possibilities for the individual approaches of dancers from any ballet culture.

#### 7.4 CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES

The research explored the position of the ballet performer and the scope of her/his artistic role in several companies and their cultures. Also observed was how contextual

issues may influence the performance and more broadly affect the scope of the dancer's contribution. By introducing cultural observations early in the research (although fieldwork was limited to one company) it quickly became clear that, in addition to the intrinsic elements of the leotard ballets, the dancer's thinking and approach to the movement is influenced by many external elements. It was observed in conversations with different dancers that their companies all had distinct training practices and methods, modes of communication, working schedules, and repertoires (3.2-3.4).

It was found, however, that not all aspects of the dancer's performance were equally culturally conditioned. For instance, it was not found that conceptualisations of stories and characters were more prevalent in one cultural setting or another, or from one training background to another. Indeed, as discussed in the "Melancholic" example (4.2), and as evident from the discussion of the dancers' modes of explorations in leotard ballets (6.1), dancers across all the selected cultures sometimes find imagery in a role, while at times dancers from the same company may find a different approach to these elements within the same work.

It was apparent, however, that the agency of the ballet dancer was perceived differently by performers from different cultures. In the international repertory troupes there was a particular sense of the dancer's desire to understand and remain firmly within the parameters of the role, yet the dancers felt that it was valuable to bring out their own individuality by reading the role and building a personal approach. The solo roles, however, were often very carefully constructed by these dancers. The field observation revealed that the dancers' personal performing styles did not become prominent until later rehearsals. In the earlier rehearsals, the dancers were preoccupied with the steps,

the style of dance movement, and the overall choreographic style. Then, after they got comfortable with the style of the dance work, their own style and finally their own agency often emerged in a more assertive manner (6.5).

Greater differences were observed, however, between the two resident companies. In New York City Ballet, the dancers viewed their contribution relative to the choreographer's idea, as they perceived it. In 6.5, Cook explained that the dancer was not considered more important than the idea (interview, 9 December 2011) and Calegari felt that the performer's work is not about "adding" anything on top of choreography (interview, 14 December 2011). In contrast, in the Forsythe company culture, where the choreographer had a very different approach, the dancers understood their contribution "in tandem" with the choreographic idea. Johnson, for instance, noted that one is not more important than the other (interview, 30 December 2008). Sometimes the choreography was even perceived as "a catalyst" for the dancer's own movement (Gelber, 2012, online). The fact that the performer's understanding of his/her own agency is distinctive and relative to the particular ballet culture is a new and interesting finding of the research.

## 7.5 THE NATURE OF THE DANCER'S CONTRIBUTION

At the start of this thesis I cited Sparshott's (1985) theorisation of the differences between the perceptions of the performer and the viewer, which deemed the latter perspective more analytical. After extensive observation of performers' renditions, and after interviewing close to thirty experienced (former and current) expert ballet performers, I can now only partially agree with Sparshott's stance. As presented in

Chapter 6, my research findings indicate more complex relationships. Sparshott is right that the two perspectives are different and that sometimes performers are not cognitively analytical about their own performance. However, the performers in the two case studies were often reflective about their performing approaches. Furthermore, more often than not, the two perspectives resonated, as my own impressions coincided with the ideas uttered by the dancer. (Konvalina's performance in "Melancholic" 4.2, Ashley's "Sanguinic" 4.3; Forskitt's "Nora" 5.3, and Lamy's "Tracy" 5.2, are just some of the examples.)

It was also sometimes the case that two experiences did not directly correlate, but this did not necessarily mean that one reading was more analytical than the other. For example, Cook's ideas and thoughts about his performance in the "Melancholic" role did not always completely relate to what I observed, yet both of us were very analytical in our assessments of it — Cook through a combined embodied and cognitive analysis and myself through detailed movement analysis of his performance.

There were some situations where the dancer engaged with the movement material more intuitively than cognitively, as Rodriguez did in "Sanguinic", for example (4.4). There were also situations when a particular effect seemed deliberate, yet the dancer was unaware of it. (For instance, Fournier in the "Nora" role seemed exceptionally vulnerable, yet she did not plan, nor was she aware of the effect, 5.3.) The crucial point here is that, regardless of whether dancers are aware of the effect or not, they have brought a visible, identifiable contribution into the role. The dancer does not need to speak about the dance — the embodied approach is at least as important and illuminating as an analytical one. In these examples one is reminded of Kirsh's (2011)

recent cognitive study (2.3), where it was observed that dancers distribute their cognition by “thinking” through their bodies. It may be that this value is exclusive to dance practice. As an embodied art form, the understanding of dance allows for both approaches — analytical and un-premeditated. In this sense, both the cognitive-analytical and the embodied, non-verbal approaches behind performance proved equally interesting, and both modes revealed new information about the ballet dancer’s relationship to the dance role.

Another significant dichotomy is observed between several dancers’ individual perceptions of the nature of their contributions and my observations on the topic as the spectator. As discussed in the previous section (and more elaborately in 6.5), dancers sometimes felt that they extended the choreographic “voice” they heard (as Cook explained about his work in Balanchine’s ballets, for example). From my perspective, however, Cook’s performance brought very unique qualities to the work, and I argue that their effects surpass the mere illumination or reiteration of the choreographer’s idea. Cook’s contribution started from the choreographer’s directions, but in many sections his dancing approach came from his own conceptual reading of the movement. For example, Cook’s deep backbends and images of “self-flagellation”, “melting down” and others, shaded his performances with a very unique palette of colours (4.2).

Similarly, Calegari felt that she “translated” the choreographer’s idea through her body (6.5). In fact, her reading of the music was very different to that of any of the previous dancers who had also worked directly with Balanchine and, as she explained, the choreographer did not say very much to her about the approach to the role. I feel that Calegari’s interpretation in “Bransle Gay” (5.5) is part of her own critical reading of the

choreographer's movement and is therefore not fundamentally different in nature or scope to Johnson's interpretation of Forsythe's "Nora" solo (5.3), for example. Even though their performing styles are very different, the scope of their contribution is similar. I would argue that both performances testify that the dancers make a significant imprint through their own commentary as it emerges in the performance.

I therefore suggested (in 6.6) that all the contributions made by dancers in leotard ballets (if they are visible to the spectator) should be viewed as a complex collection of qualities that together form a type of "agency." This agency, I argued, reflects better than other concepts (such as performance style for example) the dancer's "capability to act" when more than one course of action is available, regardless of whether the action was consciously intended or was achieved through "tacit knowledge" that the actor may not be able to explain (Giddens, 1984, 57). This internalised active knowledge that collectively forms the dancer's habitus is sometimes the actualisation of the dancer's personal performing style and a partial product of training (Morris, 2000), and it is sometimes influenced by the dancer's conceptualisations (6.1) or embodied thinking (Kirsh, 2011). Furthermore, it could be said that some performances are creative contributions (Sawyer, 2006), or even "critical interpretations" (Thom, 2003). As the dancers' approaches to and ideas about the specific leotard role may change throughout their career, their contributions may at different times be composed of different proportions of the elements described above.

While the aim of this study was not to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the dancer's contribution, these conclusions inevitably emerged from the empirical findings and through the methodological blending of the two perspectives.

It cannot be emphasised enough that, without the acknowledgement of the dancer's (spoken or dancing) input, the spectator's analysis would not have offered a picture nearly as complete.

## 7.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

### 1. THE ISSUES OF ABSTRACTION AND PLOTLESSNESS IN LEOTARD BALLETS

In this thesis, the concept of leotard ballet was viewed in its historical and conceptual context. It is proposed that further research could be conducted to explore other adjacent forms of plotless dance and modes of abstraction. The leotard ballet sub-genre also may be explored more widely than it has been examined in the present study with its focus on the more minimal style (practice-dress). For example, interesting material would arise from research into the impact of highly decorated leotard costumes which, in contrast to the spare ballets discussed in this study, can refer to supernatural stories, or metaphorical beings, concepts and creatures, as pioneered by Bakst in Fokine's *Le Spectre de la rose* (1911) and Nijinsky's *L'Après midi d'un faune* (1912). Additional research in this aspect might also be carried out with reference to the theories of narrative and plot, as well as Osborne's modes of "semantic abstraction" or indeed more generally to alternative theories of abstraction.

Whether creating such taxonomies is a useful method for dance studies is another discussion altogether. But, even if we (in the field of dance studies) prefer to reject the cataloguing approach or indeed reject the concept of "abstraction" in dance (as is the current trend in the visual arts), this should be preceded by a thorough analytical discussion. My hope is that this thesis may provide an impetus for further discourse.



## 2. THE BALLET DANCER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ROLES IN LEOTARD BALLETS

As established previously, there are obvious benefits to framing the discussion of the dancer's contribution within the particular genre-specific lineage. In this sense, it would be interesting to investigate other choreographers' works that have the aesthetic of leotard ballets — for example, ballets by Jerome Robbins, Jiří Kylián or Christopher Wheeldon — and assess the dancer's relationship with similar intrinsic elements highlighted in the present study. It would also be interesting to explore whether these (apparently genre-specific) attributes appear in other dance genres both inside and outside ballet.

Various imaginary, metaphoric narratives or structural points may inspire other dancers in other genres of ballet too. The notion that the dancer may be communicating a personal narrative, or indeed a docu-fictional theme (6.1), may well be present in the performance of some narrative works. In addition, the correlation between an affinity to think in terms of structural and formal ideas and the comfort level reported by dancers in plotless ballets could be fruitfully investigated further.

## 3. THE DANCER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE DANCE WORK: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHOREOGRAPHIC STYLE

Dancers respond to multiple issues when they interpret their leotard ballet roles. The performers' focus may be narrow — paying attention solely to their own role, or wider — some dancers explicitly observe how their part fits into the context of the full work.

This is important for two reasons. Such significant differences may signal the dancer's incomplete overall understanding of the work, or even more widely the choreographic style and repertory. This aspect, however, also may be seen to identify dance texts that promote various interpretative possibilities. (The fact that at least some choreographers are comfortable with this concept was discussed in the introduction of Chapter 5, in reference to Forsythe's "ballet ballets", and in particular this is discussed in the opening of *the second detail*, 5.0.)

In the current study, however, this finding opens up more questions than it offers firm conclusions regarding the influence of the dancer over the two distinctive choreographic styles. Certainly more investigation would be welcome with regard to this issue. Furthermore, a more detailed consideration is needed to observe the links between different coaching and staging methods and the influence over the dancer's understanding of the role.

#### 4. THE DANCER'S PERSONAL HABITUS AND ITS IMPACT ON ARTISTIC AGENCY

It is useful to explore ballet dancers' performing approaches in relation to their habitus, both in the context of their company (the collective habitus as the social, cultural and working structure and the aspects of the "cultural capital" gained from it), and in terms of the dancer's individual habitus, as an ever-changing internalised knowledge, and as Roche (2009) found, maybe even a type of "moving identity". While this thesis acknowledges this profound relationship, more work needs to be done to understand what aspects of cultural learning and training background are most important for each dancer's individual habitus. Furthermore, it would be useful to explore what elements

most dancers use continually, throughout their careers. As explained in Chapter 3, different dancers view different elements of their training as creatively useful tools and, as shown in Chapters 4 and 5, the dancers sometimes end up using their training in even more elaborate ways than they might have anticipated.

Gaining a better understanding of the dancer's habitus could also change how we think about contemporary ballet training. The issue of the correlation between training in the ballet class alone and the dancer's creativity and agency was already raised by Salosaari (2002, discussed in 2.3). The present findings, however, suggest that dance training outside the class has a great influence and that it should be investigated in detail too. Forsythe's approach in his resident companies suggests that he recognises this issue, as his training goes far beyond the traditional primacy given to the physical, or sometimes aesthetic, properties of the movement. It would be useful to think about other choreographic repertoires and how they could benefit from this broader (conceptual and social) approach to training.

## 5. THE CONFLUENCE BETWEEN TRAINING, COMPANY CULTURE, VERBAL ARTICULATION AND THE PERFORMER'S AGENCY

In the context of dance learning, the influence of verbal and non-verbal types of communication is another topic of interest for further investigation. Of the company cultures considered in the study, Balanchine's showed the most apparent separation of spoken language and movement in the studio. Although he gave clear tasks in his classes, his largely non-verbal exploration of movement functioned as a further layer of (visual/embodied) training and, whether coincidentally or as a direct result, some

dancers developed very sophisticated readings of the choreographer's body language (6.4). To what extent this type of reading of the choreographer's embodied directions also serves as an additional aspect of dance training is not fully clear.

Equally, it is important to consider what types of trainings should be developed within different repertory companies in order to address the differences in choreographic styles and the working processes that facilitate them. For example, Forsythe's idea about the "discursive" disposition towards dance performance in [his] dancers (Forsythe, in Brown, 2012), arguably led him to develop core working strategies in his company. In his highly verbal culture, dancers quickly developed their own verbal and embodied movement articulation (3.6). They also had a unique view of their own agency and developed a more assertive style of contributing to the process and performance. What kinds of training are optimal to prepare dancers in ballet repertory companies to be open to such a choreographic approach? Is it enough to use external répétiteurs only in the relatively short periods before works are put on the stage? Although this question is very broad, it also relates directly to the previous points made about the dancer's relationship to the dance work, and its potential (beneficial or detrimental) impact on the choreographer's repertoire.

## 6. THE DANCER AND THE PROJECTION OF "SELF" IN LEOTARD BALLET ROLES

The question why dancers see more of "themselves" in some works, rather than others, is an interesting area for future research. As Caspersen explained (p. 251), there is a distinction between the "stage persona", the heightening of the senses in performance, and the feeling of being "oneself" (as opposed to "behaving and experiencing" in a way

one normally “would not”). While this effect is reported by dancers in various contexts, the research showed that repertory company ballet dancers performing Forsythe’s choreography particularly experienced an amplified sense of “self.” Many dancers felt that they were representing themselves, rather than a character in their roles from Forsythe repertoire. Whether this effect comes out of the particular dance components or from the performance frames in Forsythe’s ballets is not entirely clear.

It is conceivable that a part of the reason for this may be found in Forsythe’s choreographic style. The movement is based on balletic vocabulary and principles, taking the performer into familiar territory, but at the same time still allowing a degree of investigative freedom, thus additionally empowering the dancer to contribute. It is also plausible that the dancers from either cultural groups in Forsythe’s works, by feeling this freedom to explore more assertively, gain a stronger sense of personal contribution. It may be that this sense of performing as a contributor (even for a repertory-company dancer) produces a feeling of enhanced gratification (the impression of sharing in the dance something that the performer her/himself helped create).

Perhaps part of the reason may be found in the combination of elements (for example, the contemporary sound of electronic music, and the inclusion of the costume by the famous fashion designer, Miyake as in *the second detail*) may relate to the dancer’s personal interests outside the professional life? It may also be that Forsythe’s performing tasks, which require such a high level of cognitive awareness of movement, engage and occupy the dancer’s attention with embodied experiences during the dance, rather than thinking about concepts, themes or stories. As Van der Wyst explained (6.2),

the dancers in Forsythe's works find themselves focused on "following the movement" rather than on external ideas and concepts.

A further investigation is required to elaborate on this aspect of the dancer's heightened sense of freedom to "be oneself" in Forsythe's roles. Furthermore, it would be useful to explore the potential values of such experiences in ballet performance. The present examples suggest that it is possible that those dancers who feel like "themselves" in a role also feel more enthusiastic about performing the work (as in the case of Forskitt in "Nora", 5.3). It would be interesting to explore what this enhanced sense of "self" in performance changes for the dancer as an artist in the long term.

## 7. THE DANCER'S AGENCY

While this study proposes the notion of agency as the principal concept for the discussion of the dancer's complex contributions in leotard ballets, at this point it is still unclear whether this also extends to the work of other dancers in other choreographic works and other dance genres. Since these concluding statements are made firmly in relation to the present research on leotard ballets, they may not apply to dancers' work with other (perhaps more prescriptive) ballet choreographers. The model of agency also may be understood differently in other styles of theatrical Western dance, as well as cross-culturally and outside the field of theatre performance.

In the end, I am confident that the multifaceted findings of this study meaningfully contribute to the current discussions about contemporary ballet performance. While the thesis focuses on a particular sub-genre of ballet, on particular choreographic styles and

on a limited selection of roles, its findings are relevant to a much broader area and point to broader questions about contemporary ballet performance. The research revealed the value of looking attentively at the dancer's agency, process and culture when analysing not only dance performances but also the dance works. It also highlighted the complex relationship between what ballet dancers think they are doing and what the spectator sees in the dance.

This study is presented as a tribute to the ballet dancer's work and artistic contribution. I am confident that studies such as this one, and others in the field that integrate the performer's perspective, inspire a deeper appreciation of the ballet dancer's artistic role. I also hope that this study's findings will be a motivation for other researchers to include the voice of the performer in their investigations, as it clearly enriches our knowledge with crucial insights.

ETHICS BOARD  
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: The Ballet Dancer's Contribution: Performing the Plotless Choreography in Leotard Ballets of George Balanchine and William Forsythe

Tamara Tomic-Vajagic

Brief Description of Research Project:

The purpose of this research is to explore the nature of the dancer's contribution and creative process in the ballet repertory that is often perceived or described by viewers as abstract, non-narrative, or occasionally denoted as leotard-ballets. The study will look at the experience and agency of dancers from different international companies in the widely performed works by George Balanchine and William Forsythe. Another aim of the research is to find out which factors impact the dancers' contributions. The main methodology will combine the performers' and the viewer's (the researcher's) perspectives, through qualitative interviews, rehearsal and performance observation, as well as the review of filmed performance records and dancers' published and unpublished recollections. The findings will be published in a doctoral thesis.

**In this interview I will ask you about your own experiences in the creative process during the creation or performance, or teaching/coaching of such ballets.**

**I will take notes during the interview and/or a tape recording may be made to ensure accuracy. Because you are an acknowledged expert, your views of the topics discussed are important because they have your authority and experience behind them. Unless you object, your comments will be attributed to you by quoting you directly and crediting your name in the thesis.**

**If any ideas or quotations from the interview are used in my thesis and/or any other publications, your permission will be sought. Nevertheless, the interview as a whole can be discontinued at any point and my notes destroyed at your request. In addition, at or after the interview you may designate any part of the interview as off the record or not for attribution.**

**Any queries you may have concerning the interview or the project as a whole will be answered promptly.**

Tamara Tomic-Vajagic, Roehampton University  
Froebel College, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PJ  
[tomicvat@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:tomicvat@roehampton.ac.uk); Tel: 079 31539161

**Consent Statement:**

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

**Please note:** if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the interviewer, or the Director of Studies, address below.

**Director of Studies Contact Details:** Prof. Stephanie Jordan  
Roehampton University, Dance Department, Froebel College, SW15 5PJ  
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## APPENDIX 2

### CORE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you please describe your ballet training?
2. Could you highlight key aspects of the training that were particularly useful as creative tools in your career?
3. What was different between your ballet school and the method of training and working in the professional company?
4. Do you remember your early so-called plotless roles?
5. What are the main differences between plotless/leotard ballet roles and those in the story ballets?
6. On average, how much time do you have to prepare (any) role?
7. Can you please describe your usual rehearsal process?
8. What is your preferred method of preparation? What aspects (if any) do you like to know about in advance?
9. Could I ask you about particular roles (from Balanchine/Forsythe repertoire of leotard ballets)?
10. How would you describe [name of the solo] to someone who did not see it before?
11. What do you remember about your process in that role?
12. How was your process in a [Balanchine/Forsythe] ballet different from a process in [different choreographer's e.g., Robbins's] leotard ballet?
13. What were the key directions from the choreographer/staging expert/repetiteur?
14. Which aspects of the [solo role] were most stimulating to you?
15. How is that solo [from a leotard ballet] different from [another leotard ballet solo]?
16. Which aspect of the [solo role] you could explore continually in the subsequent

performances of the same ballet?

17. Were there any particular changes in your approach in the role that you remember, and if yes, what were the reasons for the changes?
18. Do you ever see yourself as a character in leotard ballets? If yes, can you please give some examples?
19. Could you tell me about [a specific step, dance phrase, movement section]?
20. What are the main differences between dancing in a leotard/body suit, and dancing in a more intricate costume?
21. As a performer, what would you hope to bring into [the dance]?
22. What do you think is the dancer's main role and contribution as a performer overall?

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